Three Generations of Women Writing Mad Women in French Simone de Beauvoir, Emma Santos, Linda Lê

Ni Cheallaigh, Gillian

Awarding institution:
King's College London

Three Generations of Women Writing Mad Women in French:
Simone de Beauvoir, Emma Santos, Linda Lê

Thesis submitted for the King's College London degree of Doctor of Philosophy

GILLIAN NI CHEALLAIGH

Department of French
King's College London

February 2015

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the evolution of the trope of the madwoman in women-authored narratives in French from the early twentieth century until the present day. Given the misogyny inherent in much of the discourse of women's madness as written by male writers over the centuries, the project asks why this ambivalent figure should appear so prevalently in the narratives of three generations of women authors during this time. The thesis explores whether the madness featured can be read as a metaphor for crisis, or rebellion, or both, and asks to what extent, when read through a feminist optic, madness is effective or self-defeating.

Using the post-Lacanian psycholinguistic theory of Julia Kristeva, I argue that the madwoman stands as a signpost for an anxiety of authorship at the intersection of crisis and liberation for women authors seeking to inscribe themselves into a male-dominated socio-linguistic system. This attempt at inscription entails a process of autogenography – (re)generating the self through writing – that is productive for the authors involved in terms of literary output, but does not always produce unequivocally positive outcomes on a personal level.

The project also examines the motif of female sacrifice – often presented as self-sacrifice – recurring prominently alongside the figure of the madwoman in the texts discussed, to ask what function this sacrifice fulfils. Does it represent an abjection of the feminine for authors who have internalised misogynistic literary standards and traditions in relation to female authorship, or does it represent a process of sublimation for the woman author as part of an attempt to assert linguistic and literary autonomy?

I conclude that the madwoman and the leitmotif of female/feminine sacrifice are intimately bound up with questions of female authorship, and the continuing evolution of these tropes reveals some marked differences between the challenges facing women writers at different moments of the past century, and also some interesting similarities.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....**4**

Key to Abbreviations.....**5**

Introduction.....**6**

CHAPTER ONE: Women's Madness in Simone de Beauvoir's *Quand prime le spirituel*.....**28**
- The Perpetual Tension of the '*cœur de femme, cerveau d'homme'*
- *Quand prime le féminin* in Beauvoir's First Fiction
- Symbolic Rejection of Beauvoir's 'Silly Girls'

CHAPTER TWO: The Return of Semiotic Madness in Simone de Beauvoir's Late Fiction: *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*.....**66**
- The Beautiful Broken Image of *Les Belles Images*
- The Madwoman on the Threshold of Feminine Liberation: *La Femme rompue*
- Putting the Symbolic Mask Back in Place

CHAPTER THREE: Through the Looking-glass into the Labyrinth: The Semiotic Revolution of Emma Santos.....**105**
- The Autogenographic Fiction of Emma Santos
- Mad Revolution: *Un cri écrit* in the Early Trilogy
- Frustration: From *cri écrit* to *Écris et tais-toi*
- Surrealist Sublimation: *Effraction au réel*

CHAPTER FOUR: Uncanny Crisis in Linda Lê's *Voix* and *Lettre morte*.....**143**
- *Hérétique, Pygmalion, Française?* Lê's Troublesome Illegitimacy
- *Remuer le couteau (de l'écriture) dans la plaie (de la folie)*
- The Uncanny Anxiety in Spectral Madness
- The Woman (Writer) in the Man's Hat

CHAPTER FIVE : Hybrid Madness and Antigonal Sacrifice in Linda Lê's Late Fiction.....**185**
- Parental Troubling and the Orphans Left Wandering
- The Bi-face Fairytale of Hermaphrodite Writing
- *L'Organisation exige un nouveau sacrifice*: The Antigone Trilogy
- Autogenographic Transcendence of Myth and Madness

Conclusion.....**226**
Appendices.....**232**
Bibliography.....**245**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, help and generosity of those around me at work and at home. The Department of French at King's College London – where I truly have felt a sense of homecoming – has been unfailingly supportive throughout my academic development. My supervisor Siobhán McIlvanney's rare blend of rigour and empathy, insight and consistent support and encouragement enabled me to persevere when motivation and energy were failing, and I owe her a debt that cannot adequately be described. Simon Gaunt is owed a particular debt of thanks for years of loyal mentoring and inspiring teaching. I also owe thanks to Hector Kolias, my secondary supervisor, for his enthusiasm at critical moments. To others I owe thanks for conversations, books put into my hands, ideas put into my head and time always generously given *de bon cœur*, including Sanja Perovic, Johanna Malt, Patrick ffrench, Anne Green, Nicholas Harrison, and Andrew Counter. In addition, I would like to thank my postgraduate colleagues at King's for their valuable support and friendship.

I am grateful to author Linda Lê for conducting an interview and meeting me in person in Paris. Several members of the Le Goff family of author Emma Santos were also generous with their experience of their sister's life and death. Fellow researchers Elsa Polverel, Michèle Bacholle-Bošković and Karin Schwerdtner also shared ideas and information pertinent to my research.

This thesis was made possible thanks to the support of a three-year doctoral studentship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, along with travel and research bursaries from King's College London's Graduate School, King's College London's Faculty of Arts and Humanities, as well as from the Department of French.

My partner Dave's patience and support has been invaluable. My parents Ann and Michael, my siblings Sharon and Brendan, Dave and my children Finn and Orla have each contributed in essential ways to how I see the world, and for that I am grateful. I dedicate this thesis to my mother, my family and friends.

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

Simone de Beauvoir texts:

DSI; II	*Le Deuxième Sexe, vols I and II*
MJF	*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*
BI	*Les Belles Images*
FR	*La Femme rompue*
FA	*La Force de l'âge*
FCI	*La Force des choses, vol I*
QPS	*Quand prime le spirituel*
TCF	*Tout compte fait*

Emma Santos texts:

LI	*L'Illulogicienne*
LMal	*La Malcastrée*
LL	*La Loméchuse*
LPD	*La Punition d'Arles*
JTES	*J'ai tuée Emma S...ou l'écriture colonisée*
LT	*Le Théâtre*
LP	*L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*
ETT	*Écris et tais-toi*
ER	*Effraction au réel*

Linda Lê texts:

Cal	*Calomnies*
LTP	*Les Trois Parques*
V	*Voix*
LM	*Lettre morte*
CAB	*Conte de l'amour bifrons*
IM	*In memoriam*
C	*Cronos*
ALQ	*A l'enfant que je n'aurai pas*

Julia Kristeva texts:

RLP	*La Révolution du langage poétique*
PH	*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*

-- Introduction --

'There is a good principle which created order, light, and man, and an evil principle which created chaos, darkness, and woman'

—Pythagoras

'In the interstices of the language lie powerful secrets of the culture'

—Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (1976)

This thesis emerged from the intersection of the personal and the intellectual – my personal past experiences as they came into contact, during my intellectual formation, with literary and theoretical discourses that attempted to articulate and examine similar experiences shared by many thousands of others. I grew up witnessing my mother's struggle with mental illness: her years of debilitating depression, her diagnosis and further years of even more debilitating medical treatment and medication. It was an experience that she suffered passively, both the illness and the treatment, and she never articulated or verbalised a response, in any comprehensive sense, to either. She never assumed active agency or control of her illness or treatment. Growing up as the daughter of a mother who had been labelled as a 'madwoman', I was faced with myths of heredity that embedded into my life the idea of madness as an inevitable fate, one which for a long time I felt powerless to avoid. However, a certain epiphanic moment came when I realised I was the agent of my own fate, and I undertook to assume my life as subject of whatever reason or madness my future might hold. When I began studying literature seriously I encountered in a new way the texts – literary and theoretical – of other women who had made a similar engagement to the extent that they had become the writing subjects of their fates, past and future. I also encountered the discourses of a patriarchal literary and cultural tradition that objectified women and posited 'woman' as Other of culture, and so often also as mad Other to a phallogocentric putatively rational One.[1] If anything was inevitable in my life, it was perhaps that I would engage in this study.

[1] This opposition is outlined in one of the most famous passages of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe I*, which resumes the situation thus: 'il est le Sujet, il est l'Absolu: elle est l'Autre' (1949, 17).

The question this thesis poses is the following: given the misogyny inherent in the discourse of women's madness as written by male writers, doctors and theorists over the centuries, why should the figure of the madwoman appear so prevalently in the narratives of a series of women authors over the past century? Is the madness featured there a metaphor for a continuing crisis, or rebellion, or both? I also explore the inextricable links revealed by this ambivalent figure, between madness and female authorship. Combining the arguments of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) with the post-Lacanian psycholinguistic theory of Julia Kristeva, in particular her theory of the semiotic in *La Révolution du langage poétique* (1974), I argue that the madwoman stands as a signpost for an anxiety of authorship at the intersection of crisis and liberation for women authors seeking to inscribe themselves into a male-dominated socio-linguistic system.

I examine the evolution of the trope of the madwoman in women-authored fiction in French from the early twentieth century until the present day. I have chosen three authors, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), Emma Santos (1943-1983) and Linda Lê (1963-), each of whose individual corpuses offers a range of fiction works featuring a madwoman or women's madness centrally in texts narrated at least in part in the first-person female voice, therefore allowing an analysis of how the trope develops within the corpus of individual authors as well as between the generations of women writers over the last hundred years. Consequently, this is a diachronic study, and does not make a synchronic comparison between texts written within a shorter time period, in the manner of the most recent study on the subject by Suzanne Dow, *Madness in Twentieth-Century French Women's Writing* (2009), which offers close readings of five women-authored madness narratives between 1946 and 1976. My study stretches back to the pre-war and pre-'68 contexts to examine the early incarnations of the madwoman, what might be called the proto-madwoman, in the writing of one of the twentieth century's most important thinkers, Simone de Beauvoir. It then explores an extreme articulation of textual madness and what might be seen as the apogee of the trope, in terms of intensity and dominance, in the 1970s corpus of the lesser-known author Emma Santos. Finally it picks up from the period at which Dow's study ends, to examine the complexities and persistence of the trope during the period from the 1980s to the present day, a span covered by the corpus of award-winning contemporary author Linda Lê. I examine the tensions and shifts between expression and repression operated on women's madness by the texts, and

consider the possibilities for transcendence, in the sense of moving beyond or overcoming crisis, suggested therein.

Dow, in her otherwise impressive study, makes the somewhat surprising claim that 'French women's writing since the 1970s has changed. Since then, the figure of the madwoman, who was such a feature of earlier writing, *has all but disappeared in women's writing* from Metropolitan France', and she sees a focus rather on 'the inscription of trauma and with recounting experiential limit-points' (2009, 190; my emphasis).[2] Looking at contemporary French and francophone female-authored texts over the past thirty years, it is clear that female madness is still a major topos. This writing may be 'marked by diversity, confidence and independence of spirit' (Jordan 2004, 17), nonetheless it still often features female characters who are in crisis, trauma, mental hospitals, mental breakdown, attempting suicide or performing a sacrificial self-destruction (or indeed all of these combined). The female subject *is* de retour in the corpus, as Morello & Rodgers point out, but 'beaucoup de sujets mis en scène sont dédoublés, éclatés, mal définis, gagnés par la folie, en danger de se perdre' (2002, 28). Notable examples include protagonists in: Lorette Nobécourt's *La Démangeaison* (1994); Lydie Salvayre's *La Compagnie des spectres* (1997); Nancy Huston's *Prodige* (1999); Chloé Delaume's *Certainement pas* (2004); Virginie Despentes' *Bye Bye Blondie* (2004); Nelly Arcan's *Folle* (2004); Leïla Marouane's *La Jeune Fille et la mère* (2005); and Gisèle Pineau's *Folie, aller simple* (2010). It is perhaps particularly important to ask why the figure persists in the contemporary corpus of French women's writing, and Linda Lê offers a rich and fascinating corpus of texts featuring women's madness. However much we desire progress and want to believe that progress has come about, and would consequently prefer simply to celebrate the (many, important) successes of women writers, it is vital that we do not ignore persistent problematic representations of the female and the female author in contemporary women's writing – that we not shut out, or shut up once more, the mad woman screaming to be heard. And screaming, or at least speaking through the text, she still is.

[2] Focusing perhaps overmuch on the example of Christine Angot, Dow argues that 'insofar as madness appears at all, it is evoked with irony in explicitly autobiographical texts where authorial subjectivity is constantly being staged' and that madness becomes a sort of postmodern pastiche (2009, 191).

Madness, Women and Misogyny

The misogyny inherent in the discourse of women's madness, whether medical or cultural, is by now well-established. Jane Ussher's comprehensive studies on the relationship between gender and madness leave little doubt as to how gendered the discourse of madness is, and how persistently prevalent the diagnosis of madness for women continues to be: 'It is women who have dominated in the psychiatric statistics for centuries, and women who are regulated through the discourse of madness' (Ussher 1991, 14).[3] Twenty years later, far from moderating this view or indeed reporting a significant improvement to this harmful relationship, Ussher reinforces her earlier statement:

> For centuries, women have occupied a unique place in the annals of insanity. Women outnumber men in the diagnoses of madness, from the 'hysteria' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the 'neurotic' and mood disorders in the twentieth and twenty-first. Women are also more likely to receive psychiatric 'treatment', ranging from hospitalisation in an asylum, accompanied by restraint, electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) and psycho-surgery, to psychological therapy and psycho-tropic drug treatments today. [...] Women are subjected to misdiagnosis and mistreatment by experts whose own pecuniary interests can be questioned, as can their use (or abuse) of power. This is not to deny the reality of women's experience of prolonged misery or distress, which undoubtedly exists. However, if we examine the roots of this distress, in the context of women's lives, it can be conceptualised as a reasonable response, not a reflection of pathology within. (Ussher 2011, 1-2)

Similarly, Phyllis Chesler tells us, 'femininity is marked as in some sense always-already pathological' (1997, 10), but that in fact, 'most twentieth-century women who are psychiatrically labelled, privately treated and publicly hospitalized are not mad [...] There are very few genuinely (or purely) mad women in our culture' (ibid., 65). There is now a growing body of authoritative literature revealing the power relations and imbalances in the discourse of female madness and the relationship between women and medicine and psychiatry going back centuries, an imbalance that appears, according to these recent studies, to persist into

[3] See Ussher (1991). Her most recent study attacks in particular the rapidly-expanding pharmaceuticals industry, what she calls 'Big Pharma' (2011, 5), consisting of giant global corporations wielding enormous financial and political power.

the present day.[4] The question of women and madness, therefore, remains as pertinent to contemporary culture as it has ever been, although now with the strength of both women's writing and feminist research, we can explore the question from radically different perspectives.

Medical misogyny is mirrored in the literary canon. If patriarchal medical discourses have contained women, literary representations of female insanity have also been for many centuries produced by male writers, often heavily romanticized and almost always disempowering. From Shakespeare's Ophelia (literally drenched in Romantic sexualisation in John Everett Millais' iconic painting), to Donizetti's *Lucia di Lamermoor*, from Flaubert's Emma Bovary to André Breton's *Nadja*, the canon is awash with male-authored mad women. English literature has begun to recognize a canon of female authors writing of their own and others' madness or mental crisis such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman (*The Yellow Wallpaper*), Sylvia Plath (*The Bell Jar, Ariel*) and Virgina Woolf's narrative explorations of both female and male mental illness. French literature has largely foregrounded *les fous littéraires* such as Gérard de Nerval and Antonin Artaud, who attain a certain idealised status of poetic genius, but relatively little attention has been given to their female counterparts until very recently. This study, alongside the work of Dow and others currently being undertaken, attempts to go some way to redressing the imbalances outlined above. If women's madness as written by male authors, 'as a description of our fears, a category for our pain, or label for our anger, both marks us as Other, and prevents us from challenging the One' (Ussher 1991, 14), we may consider that madness as written by women authors may serve to reproduce this disempowering self-marginalisation, but may also produce a means for women to write their own fears, pain and anger for themselves, and thereby resist the silencing effected by the discourse of madness, and patriarchal culture in general.

What the narratives in this study reflect and reinforce is the twentieth-century's growing awareness of the intimate nexus between the discourses of women's madness, of patriarchy and feminism and the encroachment of this discursive encounter into the literary. Chesler and Ussher use the broad term 'madness' to encompass a range of behaviours, symptoms and

[4] Elaine Showalter's authoritative study *The Female Malady* (1987) focuses on exposing patriarchal oppression in the diagnosis and treatment of women since the early 1800s, from a literary feminist perspective. From a clinical feminist perspective Chesler (1997) and Ussher (1991; 2011) are comprehensive and persuasive. Susannah Wilson's historical study of the psychiatric memoirs of four French women writers between 1850 and 1920 also attests to institutionalised misogyny in psychiatric medicine, although she strikes a very balanced tone, revealing the sympathetic relationships that could often develop between women patients and their male doctors (2010).

crises displayed by women that have been diagnosed or categorised predominantly by men, or at least patriarchal institutions, according to socially and historically contingent standards and norms.[5] These categories have expanded to a now-dizzying array of classifications enumerated by international professional bodies in the *Diagnostics and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) and the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD), the 'bibles of psychiatry' devised by the American Psychiatric Association and the World Health Organisation respectively (Ussher 1991, 100). Ussher points out how so-called scientific truths regarding mental illness, such as hereditary predispositions to madness, are contingent and often disproved or subject to flux in later research.[6] It is not the aim of this thesis to deny the debilitating reality of mental suffering, depression, severe mental disorders or the physical symptoms of mental trauma. However, it is important to underline from the start the misogyny and power dynamic involved in the figure of the madwoman as she has been socially, medically and culturally constructed.

To analyse and discuss the madness of the characters and the texts I study here, it is necessary to move beyond the parameters of the rational medico-scientific framework. I follow Chesler and Ussher in employing the term 'madness' as a broad signifier, to encompass a range of descriptions of crisis, severe physical, linguistic or mental breakdown attributed to excessive or aphasic women characters in the texts analysed in this study. I do not here adopt medical or psychiatric categories of madness as a way to structure this study or to approach the texts, although as a viable methodology this would offer the opportunity to interrogate and challenge those categories, and I am aware of interesting work currently being done in this area by other postgraduate researchers. This study is not principally an attempt to understand *why* women suffer, embrace or experience madness, although a sense of understanding does, hopefully, emerge from the readings. It is rather to take account of the narrative discourse of madness as produced by the female writing subject, and to listen to the madwoman in literature, and attempt to understand what she says about women, intra- and

[5] Ussher offers a full explication of her stubborn retention of this broad term over the current medical use of 'mental illness' which she argues implies an internal pathology needing only to be found and named by biomedicine, and one which also relieves the individual (patient) of responsibility, encouraging medical dependency (2011, 3-4).

[6] See in particular Ussher (1991 Ch.5). In both this and her later study Ussher has recourse to Foucauldian concepts to unpick the extent to which these categories are discursively produced and legitimise the medical profession's right to diagnose, treat and medicate women (2011, 4-5).

extra-diegetically, and about the relationship between woman, language and society, both narratorial and authorial.

Madness, Women and Writing

The presence of women's madness in women's writing brings us to the issue of the double bind, as recognised by several writers on madness in literature, such as Allen Thiher (1999) and Susannah Wilson (2010).[7] This acknowledges the problem of resisting, or attempting to reform, systems of thought that are built in and through language, with only language as a means of resistance, which thus risks reproducing the very same sexist and oppressive ideology that language is contaminated with. As Toril Moi states, 'The attack on phallocentrism must come from within, since there can be no 'outside' [...] We can only destroy the mythical and mystifying constructions of patriarchy by using its own weapons. We have no others' (1981, 73), and the difficulties of achieving this attack and the challenges of the double bind are central to the writing of Emma Santos. Women's madness as a sexist construction is therefore best destroyed and demystified by re-appropriating the trope in an attempt at an empowering rewriting, and we may ask to what extent the texts in this study undertake or achieve this. We must consider that the only extra-linguistic means of resistance to language, or the logos, for the speaking subject are: suicide or death as the only position truly beyond language; isolation or social exile in a space beyond communication; madness as a position external to or refusing the logos, yet still within the realm of communicability. These triple motifs of suicide, exile and madness are closely interconnected and they recur frequently in the corpus here, as positions the texts oscillate between in attempting to negotiate the double bind. We are confronted with the inescapable reality that in order to describe, express, represent or negotiate these 'extra-linguistic' positions we must necessarily have recourse to language or to cultural practices in some form. Ultimately, as Moi suggests, the most effective way to resist language is to rewrite it, thereby reforming the structure itself both from without and within simultaneously, and this process of rewriting (the madwoman) is what the texts here are engaged in.

[7] A similar, though subtly distinct point is made by Shoshana Felman in *Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy* when she states, 'madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation [...] a *request for help*, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration' (1989, 118; original italics).

In the corpus I have selected there is an undeniably central nexus between the figure of the madwoman and questions of female authorship, as anxieties about the right to be (a woman) and the right to write (as a woman) overlap and crystallise in the trope. The madwoman reveals the anxieties inherent in the process as 'woman', the object of culture, becomes 'women', the writing subjects of culture. Gilbert and Gubar's influential study *The Madwoman in the Attic* first identified the figure of the madwoman with an anxiety of authorship specific to women authors, in the context of English writers of the nineteenth century. Building on Harold Bloom's idea that the anxiety of influence experienced by the male writer leads to a strategy of repression of the poetic precursor, a sort of killing off of the literary father to assert the ascension of the next generation (Bloom 1973, 14-15), Gilbert and Gubar argue that due to the lack of female precursors, or literary mothers, women authors experience an alternative anxiety:

> For an 'anxiety of influence' the woman writer substitutes what we have called an 'anxiety of authorship', an anxiety built from complex and often only barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex. (2000, 51)

The strategy of repression, the 'killing off' Bloom sees as necessary to enable literary production, is effected by the woman author through the creation of literary alter egos personifying the deviant madness or monstrosity of the act of writing as a woman, alter egos who are then banished to the attic of the text and/or killed off in order to legitimate or authorise the female authorial project. The paradigm is Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in which the heroine Jane is haunted by her struggle with the paradigmatic madwoman in the attic, Bertha Mason, the first Mrs Rochester. Bertha's excessive, bestial madness offers a personification displacing what was deemed culturally unacceptable in the feminine from Jane, who is liberated by Bertha Mason's suicide when the latter sets fire to Thornfield Hall and jumps off the roof of the burning building into the abyss.

The Madwoman in the Attic has come under attack from key figures within feminist literary criticism, including Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak (1989) from a postcolonial position (Bertha Mason, being a Creole, figured the violence of literary imperialism) and Toril Moi (2002) from

a poststructuralist perspective.[8] Moi's criticism in particular has undermined the notion of a nexus between the figure of the madwoman and an anxiety of female authorship and must be engaged with. Moi in her seminal *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) argues that Gilbert and Gubar's approach is reductive, reducing character to author, and revealing 'a desire to write the narrative of a mighty Ur-woman [writer]', a 'mother to us all' (2002, 66) and she exhorts feminist criticism to avoid the mistakes of their study in favour of the Barthesian doctrine of the death of the author in order to 'undo this patriarchal practice of authority' (ibid., 62). Dow points out that Moi's position 'elides the anxieties that many feminist critics have felt about what possibilities for feminist readings of literary texts might be foreclosed by adopting such a position' (2009, 17), and I believe there is much to be gained by recuperating the connection established by Gilbert and Gubar between the figure of the madwoman and anxieties of female authorship. The latter authors themselves in their 'Introduction to the Second Edition: The Madwoman in the Academy' respond robustly to criticisms, characterising them as highly-abstracted literary theory constricting the humanities within quasi-scientific terminology that alienates the non-specialist public and effaces categories of identity to such an extent that it becomes almost impossible to talk meaningfully about women's writing at all (Gilbert and Gubar 2000).

Seeing the madwoman as purely negative and symptomatic of only rage, of which Moi accuses Gilbert and Gubar, does to some extent reproduce phallogocentric prejudices and limits the terms of the discussion or analysis of the figure's presence in literature. However, Moi's recourse to the Barthesian severance of the link between author and text itself places a damaging limitation on the analysis of the literary that is, in my view, unproductive and in fact, counterproductive. While Moi astutely highlights some flawed elements of Gilbert and Gubar's approach and terminology, this does not invalidate their entire thesis. Moi appears to be confusing distinct notions of authority and conflating the sense of authority an author may or may not feel to write (the right to write) with the authority of the author over the production of meaning in the text (the right to determine the meaning of the text), or in other words the authority to take up the pen at all as distinct from the authority over what that pen produces (although as we shall see with Beauvoir, the two may be related). What I believe Gilbert and Gubar attempt to bring to light, is how the madwoman figures the anxiety of the

[8] Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) offers a moving pre-writing of Bertha Mason's personal history in the retrospective prequel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, from a postcolonial feminist perspective.

woman author about entering literary and linguistic territory from which she was effectively excluded for so long. Regardless of Moi's anti-authorial stance, we irrefutably still live under the sway of authority, and no less so in the academic and literary arenas where titles and hierarchies of position and interpretation persist, and indeed Moi's own response attempts to arrogate to itself an authority of interpretation.

Barthes' pronouncement has been the subject of some rethinking in recent years.[9] The *Tel Quel* group's severance of the literary object from the human source of its production, bequeathing us texts floating in discursive space with no human anchor, produces a nonsense based on a fiction as restrictive as the idea of a single authorially-produced truth or meaning was in the pre-Barthesian context. The literary text is not the creation of a disembodied abstraction existing only in the pages of theory and criticism. It is the production of a flesh and blood person, which forges a link with the reader, another flesh and blood person. Is this not one of the very precious qualities of literature? We may have arrived at a point where Barthes' murder of the author has become more of an obstacle than liberation from semantic control.

In her 2002 Afterword to *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Moi acknowledges these concerns, and both significantly qualifies her previous Barthesian stance and vigorously defends the ontological category 'woman' as a speaking subject. In contrast to Barthes' position that, 'l'écriture est la destruction de toute voix, de toute origine' (1984, 61), Moi is at pains in 2002 to posit that, 'In my view [...] there is always someone who speaks, acts, thinks, writes' (177). She further rehabilitates the validity and necessity of the category 'woman' for feminist literary criticism and feminist politics, reacting against the poststructuralist moves in the 1990s to reduce the concept 'woman' to the effects of gender discourse, 'The result is that women are divorced from their bodies, and that "woman" is turned into a discursive and performative effect. It is difficult to see what the advantage of such a convoluted view might be [...] We don't have to claim that there are no women, or that the category "woman" in itself is ideologically suspect' (2002, 178). Moi here articulates a growing concern among those for whom the more recent focus on 'gender' in the academy has tended to occlude (once again) the women who ought properly to be at the heart of the feminist project. This study aligns itself with the Moi of 2002, allowing us to engage in the consideration of the

[9] See for example Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author* (2008) and Jane Gallop, *The Deaths of the Author* (2011).

relationship between the writing woman and her literary material, and always from the position that

> [t]he decentred subject has the capacity to act and make choices. Such choices and acts, however, are always overdetermined, that is to say deeply influenced by unconscious ideological allegiances and unconscious emotional investments and fantasies as well as by conscious motivations. (Moi 2002, 177)

This thesis aims better to understand the texts of the women who are our literary mothers and sisters – not to 'decipher', as Barthes warned us about, a single truth the authors intended for their texts, but to 'disentangle' some truths through the texts and what they may tell us of women's evolving relationship with writing/language.[10] While we must not be limited by the author's intentions for their text, neither should we be limited from considering the author as a significant element of the text's context of production, or in other words, 'tout énoncé narratif ou descriptif ne saurait être neutre; il conserve la trace du sujet de l'énonciation' (Le Calvez 2002, 265).

To return to the madwoman, the split Gilbert and Gubar identify through the figure in the nineteenth century in the binaristic terms of angel/monster, docility/rage and so on, becomes far more dialectical and complex in twentieth and twenty-first century women's writing. The madwoman in the corpus selected here is not posited in opposition to an angelic female, rather she encompasses within her the conflicts and contradictions at work within the contemporary woman writer. To explore productively the figure of the madwoman in these texts I have found it fruitful, and indeed as my research progressed, increasingly imperative, to take cognisance of the relationship of the author to the text, to read the text in light of the context of salient details of the author's life and position in relation to their own status as an author. Therefore, at times I read these texts at the intersection of life and writing, as metonyms of the struggle for female authorship. Character is not author, of course. However, character can be employed in textual production, consciously and unconsciously, to express and negotiate desires, anxieties, conflicts and ambivalences within an author and a society, as Toril Moi suggests above.

[10] See Moi (2002, 61-2). It must be observed that Barthes' 'disentangling' could easily be seen as 'deciphering' by another name. Even though 'disentangling' gestures towards semantic multiplicity, I would argue that what he calls 'deciphering', for many critics, has always been to suggest one possible truth among others.

In his study of gender construction in medieval literature, Simon Gaunt points out that characters are 'tools to think with' (1995, 71) in the (re)construction and (re)negotiation of identity through writing, and this is just as true of a gendered conception of authorship (the identity qua woman writer) as of sexual identity. We may consider that the madwoman is a particular tool for women authors to (re)think their relationship with language, and the female self. The text is often a site of negotiation, reaction, confrontation, sublimation or the surmounting of conflicts and anxieties, as the growing field of trauma studies and scriptotherapy recognises, for example. This is particularly true of autobiography and 'life-writing', as discussed by Suzette Henke in *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing* (1998), where she sees life-writing as including memoirs, diaries, letters, journals, fictional texts and *bildungsroman* novels, and argues that 'every novel incorporates shards of social, psychological, and cultural history into the texture of its ostensibly mimetic world' (Introduction xiv). She asserts that

> Women daring to name themselves [...] reinscribe the claims of feminine desire onto the texts of a traditionally patriarchal culture. In so doing, they begin to celebrate a semiotic discourse and a maternal subculture that has always generated experimental modes of feminine self-invention. (Henke 1998, xvi)

I will discuss the semiotic and maternal subculture below, but it is important to consider fully the notion of feminine self-invention first. With recourse to Lacanian ideas of the misrecognitions involved in the formation of the ego, Henke considers how this process of feminine self-invention may involve the dis-membering and re-membering of a fragmented subject and 'reinventing the shattered self as a coherent subject' in order to 're-member the fragmented subject and regain an enabling sense of psychic coherence' as a way to resist received ideologies and gain agency in the world (ibid., xix).

The texts I examine in this study are not properly speaking autobiographies, however they are texts considerably blurring the generic borders between life/writing/self/fiction and draw heavily on the author's biography in each case, and they display features that might be classed as life-writing, autofiction or autobiographical fiction. In my view these texts are particularly strong examples of a process I see as autogenography, a continuous process of generation and regeneration of identity and subjectivity through writing, involving decomposition and

recomposition in language.[11] While autobiography describes the retrospective (in)scription of a historic identity (which will of course involve a certain amount of rewriting), autogenography as a concept takes account of the *ongoing process* of the renegotiation of identity that takes place in and through writing, and in the corpus of an author this may be seen to produce a persistent writing, overwriting and rewriting of the self. This autogenographic force of writing was recognised in other terms by André Gide in 1893, describing the effect that writing a book has on the writer during the writing process, 'en sortant de nous, il nous change, il modifie la marche de notre vie' (Gide 1996, 171).

Madness as a trope may be seen as a ground zero of the deconstruction of the self implied in this autogenographic evolution, or at least as a figure signposting the process, and the corpus of the three authors in this study reflects a particularly marked autogenographic dynamic between the author and her fiction narratives in each case. For Beauvoir, an author heavily invested in her literary persona, this process produces a highly intentional construction of identity in tension with conflicting and largely unconscious impulses more rooted in the personal and the feminine. With Emma Santos, the process is continually (self)destructive and suspended, as the volitional fragmentation of identity produces a *sujet-en-procès* seeking restoration through a writing that is itself fractured and incapable of producing a coherent sense of self. For Linda Lê, the act of writing is a compulsive reproduction of new subjectivity that perpetually rewrites and over-writes textually-produced iterations, and it is the ever-future-oriented yet nonetheless productive quality of this process that appears to offer the promise of transcendence, in the sense of sublimation or moving beyond crisis and anxiety, for the author – although it invites the question, what happens when writing stops? Each of these writers, in my view, speaks from deeply personal sources of pain, anxiety and frustration into the more universal space of writing, and each communicates diverse truths of women's experience that transcend the personal and elaborate a sense of shared collective identity for women.

[11] Jeanne Perreault's concept of 'autography', seeing writing as a significant element in the process of self-making, is focused on a more fixed idea of feminist political identity-creation and stops short of a constant process of creation and re-creation through each new text of fiction. See Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (1995).

The Revolution of Semiotic Madness

I have touched here on ideas of the relationship between madness, literature and women as being prime avenues of investigation in this study. Two of the most influential theories of madness and literature are articulated by Michel Foucault, in *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1972), and Shoshana Felman in *La Folie et la chose littéraire* (1978). Dow's introduction to her study on madness in women's writing offers a brilliant exposition of these theories, which need not be repeated here (2009, 3-14). These theories offer important ways to conceive of the relationship between madness and literature. Through Foucault we recognise madness as a socially and linguistically contingent concept both discursively produced and repressed from the logos. Felman, in turn, promotes the notion of madness as an aspect never entirely absent from the text itself (in particular the literary text), present as a 'constituent element of *écriture*' that as a result of the madness produced by textual undecideability leads to 'the insurmountable resistance of the literary text to attempts to "cure" it of its polysemic aspect' (Dow 9; 14). What these theories do not do, however, is to consider the specific question of gender or women's writing. Felman is concerned with literature and madness largely removed from issues of gender, and Foucault appears to have considered only male writers such as Shakespeare, Nerval and Artaud in a study focused on social attitudes and discourse more globally (*langue*) rather than on individual experience or the individual discourse (*parole*) of a particular writing subject.

This is not a theoretical thesis, it is above all a study of literature, and I have been cautious to avoid allowing the texts considered here, or my own analysis thereof, to become overwhelmed by excessive theoretical digression. Nonetheless, I have found a psychoanalytical framework to be the most productive and appropriate in supporting the approach outlined above which concerns itself with both conscious and unconscious material in fictional narratives which depict female figures experiencing mental breakdown or crisis. In particular, I have employed Kristeva's post-Lacanian feminist psycholinguistic concept of the semiotic, to varying degrees, in all five chapters, and it is therefore essential to adequately elaborate the theory. While Kristeva also focuses on male writers in applying her theories, nonetheless her theories themselves, due to the feminist root from which they spring, offer a uniquely sensitive perspective for analysing writing by women on the issue of madness. Kristeva began developing her ideas in the late-1960s and *La Révolution du langage poétique* (1974) saw the full formulation of *le sémiotique*, as distinct from *la sémiotique* (from the

linguistic field of semiotics).[12] At the heart of the theory is the *necessary* dialectic between the semiotic and the Symbolic.[13] In Kristeva's reordering of the Lacanian Borromean knot of Real, Imaginary and Symbolic orders, the semiotic is one of two essential and mutually-dependent components of what she describes as a *signifying process* – as opposed to language – the other being the Symbolic. With its source in infancy, the semiotic is linked to what Freud identified as the drives (primarily the sex drives and death drives) and is therefore connected to the maternal, as the drives orient the body to the mother (RLP 26). The Symbolic is linked to family and social structures and is closer to the paternal (Lacan's law of the father) in a patriarchal socio-Symbolic system. There is a constant dialectical process at work between the two terms, semiotic and Symbolic, comprising drives and impulses in dialogue with wider social structures – or in other words, the bodily, the profoundly pre-subjective and individual, in relation with the social.

For Kristeva, the Symbolic is 'thetic', representing thesis, fixity, divisions of subject and object, and the semiotic is anti-thetic, marked by ambiguity and paradox, and precedes the subject/object division. Linguistically, the semiotic is connotative, emigmatic, poetic and articulated by an elliptical, asyntactic, irrational style – what we might call 'mad' language (the Kristevan 'genotext') – whereas the Symbolic is denotative, lucid, rational, grammatical and syntactically obedient, in other words a sane and ordered discourse (Kristeva's 'phenotext'). She insists, and this is one of the most interesting aspects of her theory, that these two modalities are each a necessary precondition for the other in language:

> Ces deux modalités sont inséparables dans le *procès de la signifiance* qui constitue le langage, et la dialectique de l'une et de l'autre définit les types de discours (narration, métalangue, théorie, poésie, etc.) : c'est dire que le langage dit « naturel » tolère différents modes d'articulation du sémiotique et du symbolique. (RLP 22)

[12] Kristeva continues to return to the themes of madness, revolt and revolution throughout her career, for example with *Soleil noir* (1987), *Sens et non-sens de la révolte* (1996) and *Revolt, She Said* (2002), and she moves to a position advocating revolt as a permanently questioning state, but which has only been made possible because of the 1968 uprisings, which she sees as a revolution. I consider her 1974 work to be the most comprehensive articulation of her theory of the semiotic.

[13] The word Symbolic refers here to the Lacanian term, and as the term 'symbolic' retains a distinct meaning I will hereafter capitalise the word when the Lacanian concept is designated.

The terms are inseparable, the semiotic cannot signify without the Symbolic and the Symbolic could not come into being without its semiotic preconditions. Language is not binary, either wholly semiotic or wholly Symbolic, but rather discourse sits on a spectrum between two poles, its position dictated by the extent to which either modality is in dominance within that discourse. The mutuality of the two dispositions in language always conceived as a *process* rather than a monolithic, immutable system, is something Kristeva is at pains to reiterate, and distinguishes her theory from other feminist theories of language.

What Kristeva manages to do is to reinsert the maternal and the corporeal into a conception of language previously structured around the paternal, the phallus and predicated on the abjection of the maternal and the feminine, as socialisation into language is accompanied by the subjugation of the drives, the maternal, the semiotic.[14] According to Kristeva, society established itself by purifying the abject, inaugurating the Symbolic, and this notion of the abject sacrifice instantiating the Symbolic is crucial to my reading of the narratives in this study. One of the strengths of Kristeva's theory is that she does not propose a simplistic male/female dichotomy in language, and she offers us a way to describe linguistic dispositions without recourse to the gendered terms masculine/feminine, which have become so contaminated by cultural determinism, essentialism and feminist counter-discourses of anti-essentialism as to be increasingly nebulous at the present time, and certainly very difficult to use in any straightforward way.

Despite the apparent gendering of the maternal semiotic and the paternal Symbolic, these terms are not coterminous with the female or male, nor feminine or masculine, but rather represent alternative positions in language of the individual writing subject in respect to the individual drives or the social, and Kristeva's textual analysis focuses on male poets Lautréamont and Mallarmé (and later in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, on Céline).[15] However, it is apparent that Kristeva does see the semiotic as possessing a 'feminine' or cultural anti-doxy or paradoxy in contrast to the patriarchal orthodoxy of late twentieth-century western capitalism, and which is why feminist thought and avant-garde literature in particular are seen as aligned. As Alison Holland argues, 'Traditionally, fiction has been dominated by the

[14] Her expansion of the concept of abjection in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980) may be seen as a development of ideas germinating in *Révolution du langage poétique*.

[15] A woman, therefore, may display a Symbolic or semiotic disposition or tendency in her writing, but she is *also*, as a woman, always in a particular relationship to the semiotic and the maternal. A man may be a semiotic or Symbolically-aligned writer, but is always Symbolically marked to a certain extent from the outset.

symbolic. Recently, it has been more affected by the semiotic' (2009, 4), as we have moved from a more putatively objective realist mode towards a more personally-implicated, subjective modern and post-modern disposition.

It is through poetic language, for Kristeva, that transgression, subversion and revolution can be achieved on the social plane. Despite the necessary mutuality described above, it is clear from *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* in particular that Kristeva views European patriarchy as excessively Symbolic and sees the need for a (necessarily feminist) revolution in language in order more fully to integrate the semiotic, which she describes as hidden by the advent of the Symbolic (RLP 40). However, the semiotic textual practice is one carrying risks for the subject, as it involves an unbounded operation of the drives in and through language, a release of the semiotic into the Symbolic, 'Ce procès hétérogène, ni fond morcelé anarchique, ni blocage schizophrène, est une pratique de structuration et de déstructuration, passage à la limite subjective et sociale, et – à cette condition seulement – il est jouissance et révolution' (1974, 15). This sexualised, revolutionary language subtended by Eros and Thanatos may require the writing subject's passage to the limits of the social and subjectivity – in other words, the passage to the brink of madness. And because of the particular relationship of women to the maternal, the risk for the woman writer is greater, 'women who let the semiotic disrupt their language expose themselves to the danger of madness' (Holland 2009, 118). Arguably, as we shall explore in the following chapters of this study, it is when the madwoman and the writing woman unite, in the mad *je* of the first-person discourse of the madwoman, *and* succeed in transcending madness, that a greater semiotic/Symbolic harmony may be detected.

Kristeva's theories of the semiotic and abjection have been used fruitfully in literary criticism, for example in Holland's study of the transgressive discourse of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, as we shall see in Chapters One and Two. However, there have also been some damaging attacks, notably from Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), and it is worth engaging with Butler's comments. She concludes that Kristeva has produced a 'seemingly self-defeating theory' (1990, 109) and 'a strategy of subversion that can never become a sustained political practice' (ibid., 110). This verdict is based on Butler's understanding of Kristeva's semiotic as a libidinal source of subversion that cannot be maintained within the terms of culture and the sustained presence of which leads to psychosis and the breakdown of cultural life itself, and so, in Butler's view, 'Kristeva thus alternately posits and denies the semiotic as an emancipatory ideal' (1990, 109). This criticism is founded on a fundamental misreading of

Kristeva's theory as elaborated in *La Révolution du langage poétique*. Butler has glossed over or ignored entirely the *necessary* relationship of mutuality between the semiotic and Symbolic dispositions that Kristeva insists upon, just as Kristeva insists on how the dynamic of this mutuality is not constant and reflects oscillations of expression and repression. Butler also appears to misread Kristeva's own acknowledgement of the risks of excessive semioticity for the subject, as for culture – risks which, arguably, we see realised in the semiotic collapse of language and the subject in Emma Santos' corpus, and it is for this reason we can read Santos as indicating a limit-point of semiotic revolutionary potential. Butler's misreading may be explained by the extent to which she appears to rely on Kristeva's later essay, *Desire in Language* (1980a) to understand semiotic theory, as the bulk of her discussion centres on this far shorter English publication, which is a less complete articulation lending to the loss of some core nuances of the concepts.[16]

What Kristeva argues for is the extent to which the semiotic can transpose, or radically change, Symbolic culture through poetic language, or through linguistic dispositions more inflected by and accepting of the semiotic, the maternal, the drives – all core aspects of the human *being*, as opposed to the human subject. In short, Kristeva advocates, in a sophisticated argument, the benefits to culture of better integrating the pre-subjective, pre-(or extra-)linguistic aspects of the human condition. Butler could be accused of a disingenuous approach that discredits a theory valorising precultural maternal values that pre-exist but persist inherently within culture. Kristeva posits that subversion *is* possible (and necessary) when the Symbolic is excessively repressive, but that is exactly when subversion is very difficult, because of the degree of repression. This accentuates the responsibility on Symbolic culture to be receptive to semiotic subversion, to acknowledge the semiotic within culture and adapt to accommodate it accordingly. Kristeva's semiotic (just like Lacan's Symbolic) may not be a universally-accepted theory, but it gives us a way to conceive of and articulate effects of and in language that have generally long been ineffable or repressed culturally, or conceived of only through phallocentric frameworks, and this has offered an illuminating lens through which to approach the trope of women's madness in women's literature.

[16] For example, between pages 111 and 124 of *Gender Trouble*, all quotations and references are to the shorter essay. Butler appears also to be reacting defensively to Kristeva's recourse to the maternal, which for Butler is *always* culturally constructed, and the former's discussion of 'the homosexual facet of motherhood, through which a woman is [...] more open to her psychosis' (Kristeva 1980a, 239), which Butler reads (again, in my view, misreads) as predicating all homosexuality as necessarily psychotic (1990, 114-5).

It is interesting to consider how the semiotic/Symbolic modalities may be identified with Foucault's tragic and classical conceptions of madness in *Histoire de la folie*, and arguably these conceptions overlap, revealing a more 'semiotic' culture in the pre-Enlightenment (tragic madness) context after which the hegemony of reason and Symbolic thesis (classical madness) was established, along with increasingly rigid patriarchal social structures. To read Foucault as inflected by Kristeva, we could argue that up to the Enlightenment, madness and the semiotic modality of language were more integrated into the conception of the human condition, whereas following the advent of the Age of Reason, madness and the semiotic have been increasingly dominated by the hegemony of the Symbolic, reducing madness to pathologising, rational scientific discourses operating to objectify (and render abject) both madness and the mad – and women. For Foucault, tragic madness now resurfaces mainly at privileged moments in the literature of writers such as Shakespeare and Artaud. I would argue that the corpus selected in this thesis reveals a tension within (women's) literature between the tragic and classical experiences of madness, and between the semiotic and the Symbolic as linguistic dispositions.

From Semiotic Repression to Expression to Transcendence

Tracing the evolution of the trope of the madwoman across the three generations of women writers included in this study, Simone de Beauvoir, Emma Santos and Linda Lê, appears to reveal an ongoing oscillation of the semiotic from repression, to greater levels of expression that reach a peak with Emma Santos and Linda Lê's earlier texts, to return to a strategy that I read as sublimation and transcendence in Lê's later corpus. In Beauvoir's earliest completed fiction work, *Quand prime le spirituel,* unpublished until 1979 but which I reposition here in the late-1930s at the beginning of her writing career, the madwoman is glimpsed and then occluded as the text exposes a tension between semiotic expression and repression that can be linked to Beauvoir's ambivalence towards her femininity and consequent anxieties as a woman author, and the text ends in semiotic repression. This leads to a symbiotic (male-female) authorial voice in Beauvoir's subsequent existentialist trilogy where the semiotic is internally repressed, followed by the return of the madwoman in the first-person narrative position in *Les Belles Images* (1966) and *La Femme rompue* (1967), as Beauvoir reconciles to a greater extent with her status as a woman (author), and risks increasing semiotic expression

that brings us to a threshold of semiotic revolution. Emma Santos' corpus (1971-1979) takes us over that threshold and sees the full expression of semiotic revolution in the post-68 context. Santos's writing takes the writer, the writing and the semiotic to an extreme limit-point of semiotic dominance, the (homosexual) psychosis Kristeva warns of, in its staging of a central female narrator first triumphantly embracing madness and then frustrated and stuck in madness as a system, and arguably the text moves with the madwoman from the attic to the asylum. Sublimation of semiotic madness is attempted in her *Effraction au réel*, completed in 1979 but unpublished until 2006 (twenty-three years after the author's suicide), yet as a result of her failure to publish, that sublimation is externally repressed. Linda Lê's extensive corpus reveals earlier on, through an uncanny semiotic staging of the madwoman in *Voix* (1998) in particular, an anxiety of female authorship as a symptom of a crisis of gendered identification, a sort of gender-troubled madness, and both anxiety and crisis are temporarily overcome by a symbiotic hermaphroditism of authorial voice in some ways reminiscent of Beauvoir's symbiotic strategy. This cedes as the madwoman returns once more in Lê's later corpus, and sublimation through an Antigonal reworking of semiotic re-confinement appears to enable a move towards transcendence, which I argue is achieved in *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* (2011), through a confrontation (in the sense of facing up to rather than facing against) with the semiotic of madness and of the maternal.

Several particularly dominant themes or leitmotifs that appear to accompany the madwoman include suicide or self-sacrifice, a particularly pronounced treatment of the maternal or maternity (either as a focus or a markedly absent focus), and a presentation of the madwoman in terms of positionality, whether through movement, confinement or the oscillation between the two. Suicide or a self-sacrificial act of abnegation is a recurring theme throughout, and can be seen as a sort of sister figure to the madwoman, whether Beauvoir's presentation of Anne's death in *Quand prime* as sacrificial martyrdom, Santos' compulsive staging of suicide, or Linda Lê's Antigonal female protagonists' self-destruction. This succumbing to the seductions of Thanatos brings us back to Bertha Mason's suicide, performed as she leaps off the roof of the building she herself has set alight. This aspect of the dynamic in *Jane Eyre* is acknowledged by Gilbert and Gubar, but perhaps its significance is overlooked or downplayed, as it is not so much the madwoman's incarceration in the attic but rather this act – the madwoman's self-destruction – that enables the narrative's happy ending in the union of the lovers. Whether we call it the condition of possibility, or the sublimation

through a protective fantasy, the death of the madwoman – the sacrifice of the female carrying the weight of anxiety, frustration, despair and victimhood at the hands of patriarchy – appears to be a compulsively necessary element in the texts studied here. This may reflect a compulsion of culture more generally, as we think of Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Ibsen's Nora – the list is long, and we realise that the suicide or self-sacrifice of the intelligent woman seeking to self-determine and live beyond the strictures of conventional roles is a compulsive motif of human culture.

The treatment of the maternal is striking in the corpus. Beauvoir's fictional works move from abjection and suppression of the maternal to what might be termed some sort of rehabilitation of the maternal figure in her final 'mad doublet' – *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* – where the madwoman is now also the mother (alongside mad grandmothers and daughters in the former). This rehabilitation occurs always against the backdrop of a certain ambivalence that appears ultimately unresolved, either because the mother is still the madwoman, or because another mother in the same text is an abject figure. For Santos, whose œuvre includes the most semiotic narratives of my whole corpus, motherhood is also a central topos, and the madwoman is the maternal figure perpetually attempting, but perpetually failing, to (re)produce a new *enfant-langage*. Maternity and madness (and lesbian homosexuality) are privileged parallel metaphors, yet each is also repeatedly aborted and thwarted. Linda Lê's narratives return to staging the abjection of maternity, with central female figures often motherless in some way, and later the status of motherhood is rejected by the madwoman in Lê's Antigonal re-confinement of madness and motherhood. This rejection, or abjection, is itself addressed, along with Lê's very autobiographical confrontation of her own experience of madness and her own relationship to her mother and motherhood, in *À l'enfant.*

The attempted inscription into culture, or 'writing in', of women by women is mirrored in this corpus by a sense of 'coming out' or a metaphor of physical positionality or movement. We recall that the feminist cultural revolution in France, as in other countries, was characterised as a physical movement, the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (M.L.F.), and in French, *trouver une voix* and *trouver une voie*, finding a voice and a path, are homophonically linked. In the texts studied here there is frequently a close parallel between the intellectual/literary or psychological trajectory of the madwoman and her physical movement or position. This ranges from confinement in an Antigonal living death to the

suspension of purposeful movement in liminal or labyrinthine spaces to a meandering *errance*. This latter word recurs frequently, denoting a directionless wandering and also connoting the *erreur* of losing one's way or making a mistake and both are linked to the irrational as distinct from the rationally-directed project. As Karin Schwerdtner points out in *La Femme errante* (2005), the *femme errante* as a literary figure is marked by a transgressive vagrancy that places her outside cultural traditions of masculine mobility and feminine immobility. The unknown journey of *errance* may produce anxiety and fear, but it may be a liberating journey of pure discovery unfettered by all we have previously known – a process of *couper les amarres* to untether the female writing subject from the anchors of the domestic, the asylum, the logos and the attics of language, opening up to a horizon beyond, the *au-delà* so privileged by Linda Lê.

A pioneer in so many ways, Simone de Beauvoir was a significant influence for both Emma Santos and Linda Lê, and in this way she can be seen as a mother and grandmother to these two later generations of women writers, and this study begins by examining Beauvoir's earliest work. The figure of the madwoman reflects an evolution in Beauvoir's writerly voice, and by tracing this evolution I explore the poetic, feminine and semiotic aspects of her voice, their expression and their repression. It is particularly interesting to realise that the figure of the madwoman, what might be called a proto-madwoman, is present from the very beginning of Beauvoir's writing career, in her first completed manuscript, *Quand prime le spirituel*, in a text in which madness, the poetic and the feminine are both expressed and repressed to reveal a profound ambivalence in the relationship between the woman writer and writing as a woman – an ambivalence that persists into the current context in the writing of Linda Lê. It is to *Quand prime* and Beauvoir's first generation of madwomen that we turn in Chapter One.

-- Chapter One --

Women's Madness in Simone de Beauvoir's *Quand prime le spirituel*

Simone de Beauvoir was writing about women's madness, in one form or another, during her entire career as a novelist. Her first completed fiction work, the collection of short stories, *Quand prime le spirituel* (published in 1979 but written between 1935 and 1937), features women characters experiencing anxiety, self-deception, and self-abnegation, as well as a young woman repeatedly interpellated as *folle* by others, yet whose psychological crisis can be seen to be a product of her particular situation. Women's madness, and its corollary trope, suicide, persists in the fiction corpus as a minor theme until it moves to the foreground in the last short chapter of *Les Mandarins* (1954), after which it dominates the narratives of Beauvoir's last two works of fiction, *Les Belles Images* (1966) and *La Femme rompue* (1967). This trajectory is accompanied by a parallel evolution of the first-person female narrative voice, the female *je*, which appears, then disappears almost completely, only to reappear along with female anxiety and madness, which, I will argue, is accompanied by an anxiety of female authority and authorship. Elizabeth Fallaize traces this:

> The development – one might also say the dissolution – of narrative structure in Beauvoir's fiction and the loss of authority of the [female] narrator-character or character focus of narration, can be seen to be closely associated with the gradual emergence of the figure of the 'negative' mad woman, who moves in stages from the background to the foreground of the texts, eventually taking over the narrative voice completely. (1988, 181)

The potentially liberating breakdown that closes the madwoman's narrative in *La Femme rompue*, and closes Beauvoir's fiction corpus, may be seen to have been a constant threat, or invitation, throughout her writing career. Does this madwoman indicate an internalized misogyny in Beauvoir's writing, to the extent it depicts the woman attempting liberation as abject and necessarily negative? Certainly, in part, but I argue here that the madwoman embodies a desire to reintegrate the feminine in language, and allows us to posit a recuperation of the feminine Beauvoir in contrast to the masculinist author she has long been

identified as. What I argue, in this and the next chapter, is that Beauvoir begins her career with a degree of internalized misogyny and a robust confidence in her authority based partly on her dis-identification with the feminine, and that this confidence is severely undermined by the rejection of her first manuscript, which results in her further abjecting the feminine voice from her fiction narratives, until much later events and her increasing social integration into a more explicitly feminine milieu effects the resurgence of the feminine in her fiction. The profound anxiety accompanying this resurrection is personified by the figure of the madwoman, who also heralds the semiotic potential of the correlative liberation from the phallogocentric Symbolic.

As I have outlined in my introduction, I adopt a broad approach to the concept of madness, to include psychological crisis and severe anxiety or significant deviance from a balanced, positive mental state. I focus here on Beauvoir's fiction works in which women's madness is central or somehow significant, or in which the death of a female character is presented as, or can be read as, sacrificial, in particular *Quand prime le spirituel*, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*. These three works are connected in quite particular ways, by theme, style, and narrative voice, and stand apart from the fiction texts in between. This split between these three feminocentric narratives book-ending the fiction corpus and the more male, hermaphrodite or shared-gender narratives of *L'Invitée* (1943), *Le Sang des autres* (1945), *Tous les Hommes sont mortels* (1945) and *Les Mandarins* (1954), congeals around the woman, and in particular the mad/sacrificed woman. It reveals Beauvoir's ambivalence towards her own gender and the anxiety this produces regarding her authority as a woman author, or as Martha Noel Evans puts it in relation to *L'Invitée*, her fiction 'stands at the crossroads between life and writing, the place where Simone de Beauvoir's most fundamental conflicts about her right to exist, her right to be female are intimately linked with conflicts about another right: the right to write' (1986, 72). I contend here that Beauvoir's patriarchal, early twentieth-century bourgeois upbringing and intellectual milieu instilled in her an ambivalence towards her gender that, with the rejection of *Quand prime,* the first (highly feminocentric) completed work of fiction she presents for publication, becomes an anxiety of female authorship figured in the madwoman. This anxiety (and the madwoman, and the female voice) are suppressed or repressed through a strategy of symbiosis with the masculine, a 'masculinisation' of narrative voice, and the murder or sacrifice of the female within the three subsequent novels produced in quick succession between 1943 and 1946.

Beauvoir's milieu changed radically in the years following the publication of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, and through her feminist activism and correspondence with readers her contact with women of all races, ages and backgrounds increased significantly. Her world became far more female. This world of women invites the female narrative voice, as well as the 'feminine' in Beauvoir's authorial voice, to come once more to the fore, but with her return anxiety resurfaces, embodied in the madwoman. This madness, although generally viewed by critics as negative, with the possible exception of Suzanne Dow (2009), also represents the terrifying potential for self-liberation, self-discovery, and for a more personal, unmediated expression of the female self. Beauvoir's female protagonists and narrators in *Quand prime le spirituel, Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* take us to the threshold of a literary and social revolution, one that takes place in 1968, just months after the publication of *La Femme rompue*, at which time Beauvoir becomes increasingly active in feminist movements, but ceases writing fiction. This madwoman reveals in Beauvoir's writing, paradoxically, a growing confidence and an increasing compulsion to write as a woman. But how was it possible to conceive of writing 'as a woman' for the author of *Le Deuxième Sexe* with its declaration that 'on ne naît pas femme, on le devient' (DSII 13), the author who continually insisted there was no such thing as feminine writing? It is contradictory to say the least, and perhaps astonishing, to read the following statement from Beauvoir very late in her life, in 1977, apparently acknowledging that there *is* a difference in, and a unique value and perspective to, women's writing. Asked by Alice Jardine whether her books could have been written by a man, she replies:

> No, certainly not. A man couldn't invent that feminine sensibility, that feminine situation in the world. I have never read a really good novel written by a man where women are portrayed as they truly are. They can be portrayed externally very well [...] but only as seen from the *outside*. But from within...only a woman can write what it is to feel as a woman, to be a woman. (Jardine 1979, 233)[1]

It is from the tension of the contradiction between this attitude and the anti-essentialist, masculinist attitude most often associated with Beauvoir that the madness of her fictional

[1] Originally conducted in French, the interview appeared in English in *Signs*, translated from the French by Ellen Evans, see Jardine (1979, 255).

madwomen and the madness of her writing are born. Her fiction issues 'from within' and produces an account of Beauvoir's experience (her own, that of the women closest to her) of 'what it is to feel as a woman'. It is drawn from personal, emotional experience rather than derived from the rational and intellectual theory about women produced in her factual and arguably also her autobiographical writings. It is not *écriture féminine* but rather *écriture de femme(s)* born of lived experience of the world particular to the condition of woman. Of course the question of whether it is possible for women, or men, to be portrayed 'as they truly are' under the pen of any individual, is contentious, but Beauvoir recognises that there is an important and valuable difference between women writing women and men writing women. Even in this era of gender troubling and gender spectrums, it must be acknowledged that there is still a specificity to the encounter between the female subject and the cultural-linguistic, or the Symbolic in the Lacanian sense.

An iconic literary figure of the twentieth century, Beauvoir is also perhaps *the* iconic feminist of the same era in global terms.[2] Choosing her fiction as a point of departure for this thesis offers several advantages. She was a woman who experienced several severe bouts of depression throughout her life and whose writing at particular intervals foregrounds women's madness and suicide framed as sacrifice. From 1927, aged 19, she began to experience 'depressive periods' that she called her 'dark nights of the soul' and this was the moment she began in earnest to write fiction: '[t]his was also the first time she turned to writing about herself, as if through self-analysis she could cut through the morass of her daily life' (Bair 1998, 107). Fiction offers a unique seduction for the writer. It both invites confession and expression, and as a result of the generic screen, allows the author to retreat to a safe distance from the material produced, and the same was true for Beauvoir. The way she viewed her depressive periods was not wholly negative, and what she called her madness was positively espoused as being related to a valuable refusal to conform that left her unique but isolated as a woman in a man's world. She wrote in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, 'Il m'arrivait de me dire avec fierté et avec crainte que j'étais folle: la distance n'est pas très grande entre une solitude tenace et la folie' (MJF 361). There is a combination of pride and fear here, as well as an approximation of self-willed stubborn isolation and madness. Writing

[2] For sources encompassing both life and work see, for example, Deirdre Bair's comprehensive biography (1990); Toril Moi's more psychoanalytical approach (1994); or more summarily, Lisa Appignanesi's *Simone de Beauvoir* (2005).

was a path out of this stubborn isolation, and out of madness, offering her a means of reflection and a channel of communication with others. She states in 1977:

> Given masculine norms, it is clear that women are more likely to be considered crazy – I'm not saying to be crazy. As soon as a woman refuses to be perfectly happy doing housework eight hours a day, society has a tendency to want to do a lobotomy on her [...] there has always been a women's revolt. Only it has usually translated itself into solitary, individualist, disagreeable manifestations [...] feminism permits women to speak among themselves, instead of simply being resentful, having personal complaints, which get them nowhere and which make them sick and ill-tempered, depressive... [...] It's much better to arrive at a collective consciousness of this problem, which is both a kind of therapy and the basis for a struggle. (Jardine 1979, 229)

Like feminism, writing was both 'a kind of therapy' and a means for her to conduct her own personal struggle, and offered a way for Beauvoir obliquely to speak among women and participate in some way in a gynocentric collective consciousness, playing the role of writer as 'médiateur' she described in 1966 ('Mon expérience d'écrivain', Francis and Gontier 1979, 439), even if at various points in her life she was uncomfortable with this role, as we shall see.

The extent to which this process was bound up with anxieties is revealed by Beauvoir's following comment in the same interview, a comment critical of Hélène Cixous' vision of a new or remade feminine language, but acknowledging that language inherited from masculine society contains male prejudices that need to be 'cleaned up': 'Women simply have to *steal* the instrument; they don't have to break it, or try, a priori, to make of it something totally different. *Steal* it and use it for their own good' (Jardine 1979, 230; my emphasis). The repeated use of the verb 'steal' points to the idea of women's writing as theft, an illicit activity that makes the woman writer a criminal breaking in to a domain legitimately belonging to men, and evokes the *effraction* of Emma Santos' final title, *Effraction au réel*.[3] Language, of course, is owned by nobody and everybody, yet Beauvoir's vocabulary here, although explicitly inciting a positive appropriation of previously phallogocentric language by women,

[3] Jardine points out the irony in Beauvoir's use of the verb 'voler' which means to steal and to fly, a pun which is employed extensively by Cixous to designate the gesture of the woman writer in *Le Rire de la Méduse* (1961).

also implicitly reveals the extent to which she still attached a certain notion of guilt and transgression to women's writing even at the end of her life.[4]

A further reason for using Beauvoir to open this study is that, as a literary and feminist 'mother' to the generations that followed her, she is a successful, published, intellectual writer and philosopher, one of a handful of women to achieve establishment recognition of her intellectual prowess, for example with the Prix Goncourt (*Les Mandarins*).[5] She is also an author about whom we know a great deal, through her own copious statements and the research of others, and this offers us a comprehensive context for the texts we shall examine. Furthermore, she became a major public figure during a period of significant social and cultural change in France that saw enormous transformations particularly in the situation of women, some of which she was influential, if not instrumental, in bringing about. She is therefore a successful woman writer, a successful feminist and a successful intellectual. I insist on her *success* for two reasons. Firstly, because it is important to understand why such a successful woman writer, so aware of the misogyny inherent in discourses of female madness as well as the sexism producing that madness, should produce texts centrally featuring madwomen, and in particular so late in her life and corpus. Secondly, because I believe her success is a key reason she was able to expose her anxiety of female authorship in her fiction, and to confront the possibilities which that anxiety, that madness, offered.

The Perpetual Tension of the '*cœur de femme, cerveau d'homme*'

Before turning to the texts, it is important to consider in detail the language and contradictions of some of Beauvoir's statements about women and writing, and about herself in relation to the patriarchal, masculine Symbolic she grew up in and in which she developed as a writer. Her masculinist attitude and the implicit sexism devalorizing the feminine, while valorizing the traditionally masculine, in much of even her greatest feminist writing, has been well-ventilated by leading Beauvoir scholars. Lisa Appignanesi, for example, writes, 'There is

[4] In another interview the same year, Beauvoir repeats the essence of this idea: 'it's hard to imagine that women can invent within the universal language a code that would be all their own. As it happens they are doing no such thing. They are using *men's words*, even if they do twist the sense of them' (David 1979, 295; my emphasis). The implication is that men 'own' language in some way, and that women 'twist' the straight line of this male language.

[5] She is, for example, only the second woman (after George Eliot) out of sixty-two 'Master-Minds' to be honoured by the British Academy, in 2014.

no doubt that *The Second Sex* is imbued with the self-same masculine bias that Beauvoir attacks as having created women's condition [...] She fails to see any 'good' in those characteristics which she attributes to the feminine' (2005, 96). Moi similarly highlights the 'rather repetitive set of phallic metaphors' and 'deeply sexist prose' and devalorization of female biological specificity underpinning *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1994, Ch.6 and in particular 152-4).[6] Other recent scholarship focusing on some of Beauvoir's later interviews and publications has begun to draw out some of the contradictions and ambivalent attitudes Beauvoir held in this regard, and to demonstrate how her attitude evolved later in life – or rather how she may have felt more confident, in the very different context of the 1960s and '70s, allowing her to express more positive views on women's writing.[7]

It is difficult to sever Beauvoir's life from her writing or vice versa, because she did not. Beauvoir was writing about herself or writing versions of herself into existence all her life, and indeed the editor's preface to the Gallimard editions of her fiction publications foregrounds how 'choisir lui fut toujours impossible entre le bonheur de vivre et la nécessité d'écrire [...] Faire de sa propre existence l'objet de son écriture, c'était en partie sortir de ce dilemme'. Leah Hewitt draws attention to the way Beauvoir's autobiography was 'continually transgressing the neat boundaries between genres, and confusing the distinctions between remembering and creating' (1990, 14). If her autobiography was partly fictional, her fiction was also often greatly autobiographical, but as Hewitt's comment hints at with the word 'creating', it was similarly autogenographic. Delivering a lecture entitled 'Mon expérience d'écrivain' in Japan in 1966, Beauvoir says of her desire to write even as a young woman, 'le sens de ce projet était de reprendre le monde à mon compte, de montrer ma vie en tant que recréée librement par moi' (Francis and Gontier 1979, 439), making clear the process of rewriting her own life *librement*, as far as possible, by and for herself. While she goes on in the same lecture to describe her mature creative process as a synthesis of the personal, 'mon histoire singulière', and the universal, it is always with the aim of communicating something personal that others may connect with (ibid., 441).

Butler argues, in her consideration of Beauvoir's most famous aphorism, 'On ne naît pas femme, on le devient' (DSII 13), that being a woman is 'an active process of appropriating,

[6] Moi does, importantly, also explicate how a gender-neutral reading of the terms used in such ideologically-loaded metaphoric ways rehabilitates the text's feminist politics.
[7] See for example, Renée and Holland, *Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: Women and Language* (2005).

interpreting, and re-interpreting received cultural possibilities' (1998, 31) and Fallaize picks up from Butler to emphasize the 'constantly ongoing nature of this process' (1998, 29). This 'active' negotiation may be unconscious as well as conscious, and for Beauvoir writing, and in particular writing fiction, was a means to conduct this part-conscious, part-unconscious active negotiation in her process of becoming, unbecoming, and becoming again, a woman – a process which I argue was constantly ongoing, autogenographically, in her fiction. As Butler reads it, for Beauvoir 'in some sense gender is a *process of constructing ourselves*' (1998, 31; my emphasis), and it was, in Beauvoir's case, a process marked deeply by ambivalence. Writing was for Beauvoir, among other things, a way to create and recreate herself throughout her life, a way to (re-)imagine and (re-)create the figure of the woman writer in the absence of satisfactory models.

She appears to present a concession to her *own* conflicted situation when she writes of the conflicts of women in general in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Following her analysis of the pitfalls for women seeking to attain autonomy, she states that if women manage to overcome these and achieve independence, this does not always mean a definitive resolution, and that even for 'la femme indépendante' there is psychological trouble, as the demands of the masculine life chosen put her in conflict with her femininity and result in 'une perpétuelle tension' (DSII, 608), trying to balance the professional/personal equation: 'Partagée entre le désir de s'affirmer et celui de s'effacer, elle est divisée, déchirée' (ibid., 606). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this wrenching internal split was one Beauvoir experienced herself. This perpetual tension between the desire to affirm and the impulse to efface the feminine within is a tension subtending all her fiction writing. It is a tension between masculine authority, the masculine literary tradition of which she aspired to join the ranks, and her emotional affinity with her own femininity and with other women (and women writers). Beauvoir was, in her own estimation, as she recalls with tangible pride in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958) a unique hybrid of masculine and feminine: 'Papa disait volontiers: «Simone a un cerveau d'homme. Simone est un homme.» Pourtant on me traitait en fille' (1958, 169) and, 'Je me flattais d'unir en moi «un cœur de femme, un cerveau d'homme». Je me retrouvai l'Unique' (ibid., 413). The latter quotation reveals the inevitable link Beauvoir saw between intellect, reason, truth and the masculine, and how exceptional it had to be for a woman to integrate into that domain. She writes:

> Je ne regrettais certes pas d'être une femme; j'en tirais au contraire de grandes satisfactions. Mon éducation m'avait convaincue de l'infériorité intellectuelle de mon sexe [...] Ce handicap donnait à mes réussites un éclat plus rare que celles des étudiants mâles: il me suffisait de les égaler pour me sentir exceptionnelle. (MJF 412)

The emphasis at this point is on her exceptional status among men, and the pride she feels at competing with her male peers, at joining their ranks and integrating into their world as a unique case.

What she aspired to, above all, was entry into the world of letters, which for her at that point remained a masculine domain, represented by the literary men closest to her. To win that entry she must earn masculine approval. As a young girl, the figure of this judgement was conventionally patriarchal, embodied in her own father, 'il jugeait souverainement [...] Du moment qu'il m'approuvait, j'étais sûre de moi' (MJF 149).[8] Bair records the adolescent Simone's 'increasing inability to identify herself with Françoise [her mother]' and how '[s]he identified herself with her father, not as a man, not wanting to be a man or regretting that she had not been born one, but as a superior woman' (1990, 60). This paternal authority waned when her increasingly left-wing views clashed directly with her father's ultra-right-wing conservatism during her late adolescence. At this point Jacques Champigneulle, the childhood friend who almost became Beauvoir's fiancé, stepped in to become the primary literary and intellectual influence over her, introducing her to Surrealism and avant-garde writers such as Gide, Cocteau and Barrès. In her adolescent reading she searched for models of her future partner in life, and the idealised image she projects is framed in terms of his authority over her, 'il incarnait le Juge suprême par qui je rêvais d'être un jour reconnue' (MJF 145).

She recounts her pride later at finally being judged worthy of entry into the circle of elite young men formed around *Normaliens* Paul Nizan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, '*J'étais fière d'avoir conquis leur estime*. *Leur bienveillance* m'évita de prendre jamais cette attitude de «challenge» qui m'agaça plus tard chez les femmes américaines: *au départ*, les hommes furent pour moi des camarades et non des adversaires' (MJF 412, my emphasis). She was proud to have earned the benevolent approval of these intellectual judges. However, the significance of the qualification 'au départ' from the woman who had published *Le*

[8] She tells Deirdre Bair that her adoration of her father was literary and intellectual, 'a love affair of the head' and Bair describes Beauvoir elevating him 'to monumental status' (Bair 1990, 59; 60).

Deuxième Sexe should not be overlooked, and Beauvoir's 1972 interview with Alice Schwarzer reveals the extent to which men had shifted from being 'camarades' to being seen more strongly as 'adversaires' for a woman who had come to identify unequivocally at that point as a feminist activist, mainly because she felt women had been let down by the (men of the) socialist movement.[9] Beauvoir had been astonished by the scandalous outrage that greeted the publication of *Le Deuxième Sexe* from the male establishment, spearheaded by literary figures such as François Mauriac and Albert Camus, and in a deluge of vitriolic letters she had been accused of being, among other things, frigid, priapic, lesbian, promiscuous and embittered (Appignanesi 100-1; Moi 1990).[10]

In the context of her early intellectual influences, however, while (female) exceptions may occur, intellectual authority resides with the male.[11] There is a surprising description in *Mémoires* of how, at the very moment of her emancipation from her family, as she passed her philosophy *agrégation* and came a huge step closer to controlling her own destiny, the baton of male authority in her life was, apparently, passed to Sartre. He it was who delivered to the young Simone the news that she had passed the examination, and according to her account, he added, 'A partir de maintenant, je vous prends en main' (MJF 473). Sartre, in the same moment, hands the young Beauvoir her freedom and takes her in hand, a dynamic to which she apparently acquiesced. This is not to overlook Beauvoir's fierce intellectual independence, including from Sartre, with whom she shared a lifetime of debate and discussion, but it is significant that she not only apparently allows herself to be 'taken in hand' by a man (and for some critics, the fact that this situation persisted all her life was her greatest *mauvaise foi*), but that she foregrounds this taking into hand in an autobiography published in the after-glow of the greatest intellectual and publishing achievement of her life.[12] Arguably, she was a woman conflicted as a result of what she saw as the binary choice between on the one hand the masculine intellectual authority embodied first in her father and then in Sartre, and on the

[9] Schwarzer (1972) in Francis and Gontier, *Les Écrits* (1979): 482-497. First published as 'La femme révoltée' in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 14 février 1972; 47-54.

[10] The entire first chapter of Moi's 1990 *Feminist Theory & Simone de Beauvoir* is devoted to an attempt to account for the overwhelmingly sexist critical reception of Beauvoir's work, which displays 'far more denigration and far less adulation than one might expect' (22).

[11] Diana Holmes (1996) offers a comprehensive analysis of the exceptional position Beauvoir occupied as a woman in this almost-exclusively male-dominated academic and intellectual milieu, particularly as a student of philosophy.

[12] It is also significant that only after Sartre's death did she allow the full extent of their intellectual and personal differences to be publicly revealed with the publication of their correspondence. See Fullbrook and Fullbrook (1993).

other hand the 'feminine' identity of emotional, religious mysticism and a life of domestic servitude represented by her mother and the many women around her in the family's bourgeois Parisian milieu. Toril Moi posits that at the time of writing *Le Deuxième Sexe* in the late 1940s the author is '[s]uspended between the mother and the father, striving to separate from the ever-present mother's body by abjecting the mother and idealizing the phallus' (1994, 174).

Beauvoir's more public pronouncements on women writers evince a desire to distance and distinguish herself from peers such as Colette which complements her desire to inscribe herself in a masculine literary tradition. She admits this much later, in her preface to Anne Ophir's collection of women's writing, *Regards féminins*:

> Quand j'ai commencé à écrire, nombreux étaient les auteurs féminins qui refusaient d'être classés précisément dans cette catégorie. Les critiques intitulaient volontiers: «Ouvrages de dames» les rubriques où ils rendaient compte de nos livres et nous nous en irritions. Ils voulaient nous enfermer dans les étroites limites d'un monde réservé à notre sexe: maison, foyer, enfants [...] Nous rejetions la notion de littérature féminine parce que nous voulions parler à égalité avec les hommes de l'univers tout entier. (Francis and Gontier 1979, 577)

Beauvoir is almost excusing herself here, with the assertion that her attitude was also shared by numerous other women writers. The opposition between *enfermement* and the infinite horizon of 'l'univers tout entier' is evoked in this admission of a sentiment that Showalter would describe as 'the self-hatred that has alienated women writers from a sense of collective identity' (1977, 11-12). Importantly, as the quotation from Beauvoir makes clear, it is a self-hatred produced by internalizing misogynistic literary standards.

This misogyny is evident in Beauvoir's section on women writers in *Le Deuxième Sexe II*. In the final thirteen pages before her conclusion, she writes about the group of women whom in theory she most closely resembles, or might most closely identify with, but the denigrating tone of her analysis reveals her disdain. Instructive is her sparse use of the collective pronoun 'nous' on these pages, not appearing until page 625, and rarely thereafter. Although she blames their socialisation, she concludes that women writers are lazy amateurs playing at art to fill their days and incapable of serious discipline, with rare exceptions such as Colette who

wrote to earn a living. Unfavourably comparing some of the finest women authors such as Austen, the Brontë sisters and George Eliot (Virginia Woolf appears to attain a unique superior status) to some of the male canon such as Stendahl and Tolstoy, Beauvoir's masculine prejudice is blatant. The greatest weakness Beauvoir accuses women writers of is their narcissistic need to write always about themselves, and we cannot escape the rich irony for an author whose *œuvre* was so consistently autobiographical:

> C'est ainsi que, sur la légion de femmes qui s'essaient à taquiner les lettres et les arts, il en est bien peu qui persévèrent; celles mêmes qui franchissent ce premier obstacle demeureront bien souvent partagées entre leur narcissisme et un complexe d'infériorité. Ne pas savoir s'oublier, c'est un défaut qui pèsera sur elles plus lourdement que dans aucune autre carrière. (DSII 620)

Self-reflection, drawing on the personal and autobiographical, are devalued here. By contrast, in her 1966 lecture, Beauvoir asserts how essentially valuable her own personal connection to the experiences described is for her fiction, even for a work of pure imagination set in a distant era such as *Tous les hommes sont mortels*: 'S'il s'agissait d'une expérience n'ayant aucun rapport vécu avec la mienne, il est bien évident que je ne pourrais pas lui donner un sens vécu en la décrivant' and 'même parlant des choses qui ne sont pas ma propre vie [...] je dois être dans le coup' (Francis and Gontier 1979, 446). Beauvoir here repeatedly draws on variations of a similar formula encompassing 'mon expérience' (441), 'mon histoire singulière' (441), 'le sens vécu d'une existence' (444-5), or 'd'expériences concrètes' (445) as being the foundations of her fiction, however much she also insists on the imperative to universalize this lived experience.

This relationship between the personal and the universal is important to analyse. Approaching the conclusion of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir recognizes that the universal of 'l'Homme' had previously always been incarnated in men, 'l'homme' and never in women, and how those applauded as genius were 'ceux qui ont prétendu jouer dans leur existence singulière le sort de l'humanité tout entière', and the vocabulary of her sequitur is apposite, 'Aucune femme ne s'y est crue *autorisée*' (DSII 629; my emphasis). The universal was gendered masculine, and women did not feel they had the authority, the right, to assume to speak for or of the universal. It is the content of this 'universal' that shifted considerably for

Beauvoir subsequently. At certain junctures, her fiction communicates far more centrally the personal experiences of *women* transposed onto a more representative universal plane in a way that could (and did) more directly communicate to women readers; at other moments it suppresses or effaces that gendered aspect of her own singularity in order to transpose experiences onto a more masculine, putatively 'neutral', universal. It is at the moments when her writing speaks from a more feminine-gendered singularity (or singularities) and aims at a feminine-gendered universality that the madwoman appears to signpost the anxiety inherent in this unauthorised *effraction*.

Illuminating inconsistencies between Beauvoir's public pronouncements and her more private emotional responses to women's writing in particular reveal even further the ambivalences in her attitude towards women's writing, and towards her own status as a writer. Colette was one of several women writers, along with Louisa May Alcott and George Eliot, who were a major influence on her as a young woman. Bair's biography describes Beauvoir wandering through book bins reading 'illicit' books by authors such as Anatole France, the brothers Goncourt 'and especially Colette, whose works thrilled her with a sense of an unknown world she found herself poised to enter' (1990, 90). This unknown world can be read as the diegetic world of Colette's texts, or more globally as the world of the woman writer. Tucked away in an endnote, Bair cites a comment made by Beauvoir during one of their many intimate conversations:

> I still remember how emotional I felt when I read Colette's stories, and I don't know why I didn't try to communicate that feeling when I wrote my memoirs [...] Probably it was because I was then in the process of becoming a well-known writer and I did not want to call too much attention to women writers other than myself. (Bair 1990, Endnote 7, 625)

This reveals, in the context of an almost private confession in the last decade of her life, the *emotional* impact Colette's writing had on Beauvoir as an aspiring writer, and the extent to which Beauvoir recognized her suppression of this connection with another woman writer, amounting to a public dis-identification. This dis-identification extended not just to other women writers, but to what she perceived as feminine aspects of her own voice as a writer. To return to *Le Deuxième Sexe*, she declares of women who take up the pen:

> si elles essaient d'écrire, elles se sentent écrasées par l'univers de la culture parce que c'est un univers d'hommes: elles ne font que balbutier. Inversement, la femme qui choisit de raisonner, de s'exprimer selon les techniques masculines aura à cœur *d'étouffer une singularité dont elle se défie*. (DSII 622; my emphasis)

The verb *balbutier* is interesting, as the mad babble evoked resembles in a sense some of Santos' writing, as we shall see in Chapter Three. Beauvoir continues, of this 'masculine' woman writer that, 'elle imitera la rigueur, la vigueur virile...mais elle se sera imposé de répudier tout ce qu'il y avait en elle de « différent »' (ibid., 623). The need to resist or choke this 'singularité' and difference within herself was precisely what Beauvoir, the rational, masculine philosopher and woman writer struggled with all her life. It is in the tension between what she thought and felt, and between what she felt she ought to think or feel or *write*, and in the ambivalence exposed by these contradictions, that the anxiety of her own female authorship – and the madwomen of her fiction – are located.

This chapter follows on in a sense from work done by Fallaize in her thorough and convincing study of narrative techniques in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction in *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir* (1988). Tracing the development of the female narrative voice, within a full analysis examining the sexual politics of Beauvoir's writing, Fallaize identifies a very marked pattern. While in Beauvoir's first completed manuscript *Quand prime,* Fallaize writes, 'the female voice is largely dominant [...] The story of the rest of Beauvoir's fiction is the story of an ever-increasing reduction of this plurality of voice, and a loss of the authority conceded to the female voice' (1988, 175). This shift in authority and dominance of the female perspective and female first-person voice towards a masculinization of her fiction is evident in the 'existentialist trilogy' of *L'Invitée, Le Sang des autres* and *Tous les hommes sont mortels*.

I will elaborate on this trilogy in Chapter Two, but in brief, the narrative voice of these texts is either dominated by the male voice or shared between male and female, and the texts lose the feminocentrism of *Quand prime.* Fallaize concludes, 'the first-person male narrative dominates the text as a whole' (ibid.), and these male protagonists 'become figures of considerable power and authority in the text' (1988, 176). *Les Mandarins*, written soon after the publication of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, restores some balance between male and female focalisation, and the first-person female narrative voice returns in Beauvoir's fiction, for the first time in the almost twenty years since *Quand prime* was rejected. In *Les Mandarins*, as the

female *je* returns, it is accompanied by female crisis, as the central female protagonist Anne contemplates suicide in the final short chapter, and the previous authority of the (male) narrators, according to Fallaize's study, 'has been removed' (177). With the final two works of fiction written more than a decade later, *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue,* the merger between the female *Je* and the madwoman (Fallaize describes her as 'the negative woman' [1988, 178]) is complete and both texts consist predominantly of first-person female narratives, in which all narrating females – indeed all major female characters - are mad or experience varying degrees of psychological crisis.

In the concluding chapter of her meticulous investigation, Fallaize nervously, hesitantly – one could almost say *anxiously* – points to an anxiety of authorship in Beauvoir's fiction in the terms of Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*. Fallaize then flags up Moi's criticism of this study, but continues to (under)state that '[n]evertheless, the point that women writers have to engage with a largely male tradition in writing at all is an important one' (1988, 179). In line with my position in the Introduction, I wish to free us from Fallaize's hesitancy and pursue the argument she so persuasively (almost irrefutably) presents, and examine in detail the figure of Beauvoir's madwoman in this and the next chapter. Such an analysis of the evolution of the trope of the madwoman reveals much about the development of Simone de Beauvoir's voice as a woman writer and of women's writing in the twentieth century. Fallaize describes her conclusions as points of departure. I wish to embark on my analysis from this point of departure. I believe Fallaize has established an anxiety of authority and authorship in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction writing. Fallaize, however, tends to see Beauvoir's madwoman almost entirely as a negative figure, and madness as the manifestation of a necessarily negative crisis. Although a motif of crisis and anxiety, the 'madness' of Beauvoir's women protagonists is also potentially liberating - liberating from the logos, liberating from masculine-coded systems of thought and language, and liberating from preconceptions of the type of novel she *should* be writing, to the promise of the type of novels she *could* be writing.

Quand prime le féminin **in Beauvoir's First Fiction**

Beauvoir's first completed manuscript of fiction, and first text of any genre submitted for publication, is not *L'invitée* as is so often stated erroneously, but *Quand prime le spirituel*. It is often overlooked or excluded entirely from Beauvoir's corpus of fiction, and is often neglected

by critics.[13] This neglect results in its exclusion from Alison Holland's recent study *Excess and Transgression in Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: The Discourse of Madness* (2009) which focuses on language and style in arguing for a certain madness in Beauvoir's fiction. In this and the next chapter I broaden that focus to the overall treatment of the madwoman in language, plot, and structure, and include Beauvoir's first text.[14] In this chapter I read *Quand prime*, a collection of five short stories, in the context of the moment of its production, at the beginning of Beauvoir's career, rather than its publication, which offers crucial benefits in terms of its position in the author's development. Written between 1935 and 1937, when Beauvoir was in her late twenties, it was rejected by both Gallimard and Grasset, and I will discuss these rejections in detail at the end of this chapter. Subsequently – or consequently – the manuscript was pushed to the back of the author's mind and 'lay in the back of a drawer, a fate to which Beauvoir had firmly consigned the manuscript in 1938 after it had been turned down' (Fallaize 1988, 143). There it stayed for over forty years. When her iconic status as an intellectual dictated that there was an imperative to publish anything Beauvoir had written, she conceded to requests to expose this early collection of short stories to public view in 1979.

When *Quand prime* did finally appear, Beauvoir disowned it in the preface that shows her – mature, successful, twenty-times published woman author – eager to distance herself from one of her most feminocentric and most experimental texts. She writes, 'Gallimard et Grasset refusèrent le manuscrit: non sans raison' (QPS, *préface* 27), and her vocabulary is consistently pejorative: the characters 'manquaient de relief'; the satire 'restait timide'; 'j'avais tout à fait manqué le récit'; 'mon échec'; 'maladroite, un roman d'apprentissage'; 'ses défauts, ses maladresses' (QPS, *préface* 27-9). Even when the text does receive critical attention, the circumstances of production and publication, and the author's distancing preface are often overlooked.[15] I contend that these factors, in combination with the tensions and conflicts at

[13] For example, a list of selected works provided by Toril Moi at the British Academy Master-Mind Lecture, 20th March 2014, listed every other work of fiction apart from *Quand prime*. Terry Keefe's 1983 study of Beauvoir's fiction offers a cursory discussion of the text. Fallaize (1988) does include a more detailed analysis, but situates the text at the time of publication, not of writing, which impacts how we read it. Recent studies such as Renée and Holland (2005) are beginning to address this neglect.

[14] Genevieve Shepherd's 2003 psychoanalytic rereading of Beauvoir's fiction corpus does include *Quand prime*, but regrettably narrows its focus once again to discuss only two of the six central women characters, Marcelle and Anne.

[15] See for example Keefe (1983) where this is scarcely touched upon, and Fallaize (1988) does not explore the implications.

work in this text, played a major role in the development of Beauvoir's voice. Importantly, though, in the negotiation between expression and repression suffered by this text and also triggered by it, Beauvoir, although devastated by its rejection, did not destroy this early manuscript, unlike Linda Lê who burned her first three published works. Although abject in its physical and psychological dark recess, it was nonetheless kept safe until its recuperation at the eleventh hour of Beauvoir's life, about which I will say more later.

Quand prime le spirituel is a feminocentric text and, as Fallaize argues, 'has an experimental quality, produces the widest range of approaches' in terms of focalisation and narrative voice and, as a result of the prevalence of women dominating both plot, focus of narration and narrative voice (of nine characters acting as narrator or focus of narration, eight are women), '[t]he female voice is thus largely dominant' (1988, 175). The five *nouvelles* foreground women's perspectives and judgements on other women as well as on themselves and on the world, thus offering a feminine universal. They are about *women* first and finally. While men play an important symbolic role, however much they may be temporarily central, they are secondary characters. The feminine universal which Beauvoir constructs here is centred not on the male subject, with women as Other, but rather on female subjects with the male as Other.

Beauvoir offers us the voices of social discourse that operate to encourage and prohibit women's self-determination, but we also have the female voice both complicit and resisting. Beauvoir combines third-person narrative, *style indirect libre* and first-person narrative, including the device of the *journal intime,* in order to contrast direct access to protagonists' thoughts, feelings and motivations with a more distanced critical perspective on the very broad range of women characters. Shifts of voice occur between stories and also within individual stories, for example in the 'Chantal' *nouvelle* where the narrative moves from diary entry to *style indirect libre* to omniscient narrator, focalising through two different women, Chantal and Andrée, to contrast their perspectives and colour our reception of the diegetic content. We read these women, even those negatively-coded in the text, 'from within', to use Beauvoir's own phrase from the Jardine interview, as well as from the outside through the alternative views of *other women* (the characters and Beauvoir herself through her many comments on her work). This multi-focality and multi-vocality also offer nuanced insights into the multiplicity of women's characters and experiences, replacing the cultural 'woman' with more authentically diverse 'women'.

However, if *Quand prime* is a text in which Beauvoir foregrounds the female, it is also a text in which her deep-rooted ambivalence towards the female and the feminine discussed in the previous section becomes visible. Beauvoir's perpetual tension produces here a text riven by a sort of schizophrenia on several levels, marked as it is by antithesis, contrasts and incongruities, as well as a repeated dynamics of attractions and repulsions. The text is split within itself, as there is a tension between the didactic message implicit in the title, towards which Beauvoir directs the reader towards, and the conflictual, incongruous treatment of the female and the feminine (and the semiotic, and madness), which operates both to foreground and suppress the feminine in the same text. This contradictory operation is revealed through the tropes of madness and sacrifice at the heart of the text, crystallizing in the figure of Anne. The character of Anne Vignon, this proto-madwoman at the heart of the collection, figures the semiotic potential of Beauvoir's writing, and the text operates the repression, the sacrifice, of this semiotic potential. Anne's death, her sacrifice, sits structurally and thematically between the pair of sisters Marcelle and Marguerite Drouffe, who are both aspiring women writers. *Quand prime* constructs the *bildungsroman* of the woman writer, but one predicated on the sacrifice at its heart. The text congeals around a void, the void into which the semiotic potential, and the madwoman, figured in Anne, are plunged. As I argue in my Introduction, the trope of suicide/sacrifice so frequently accompanying the madwoman is a mechanism which often appears necessary in order to instantiate the (Symbolic) woman writer. Beauvoir's challenge is that as a woman, but a devotee of the Symbolic as we have seen, she is in conflict within herself and struggles to reconcile her semiotic potential with her Symbolic predilection. The madwoman, who figures the expression of this semiotic potential, flickers briefly in the text with a promise of poetry and revolution, only to be repressed from Beauvoir's *écriture* at this point in her career.

The title of the collection points us to the obvious narrative of liberation contained in its five *nouvelles*. Characters in relatively stereotyped outlines are presented in antithesis, pitting those aligned with the title's *spirituel* against those on the side of the 'real' and prepared to be relieved of those idealisations, or in other words, to be cured of their *idées reçues* or patriarchal systems of thought such as religion, mysticism and literary cliché. The outcome, the consequence the title directs us towards, is Anne's death, presented as the inevitable tragedy resulting when the spiritual wins out, and modelled on the story of Beauvoir's childhood friend Zaza (Élisabeth Le Coin) so central to *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. The

corollary is the positive triumph of Marguerite, who is described freeing herself from ideals to see the world clearly in a process marked as a successful journey of self-discovery and female liberation for this young woman writer.[16] So far, so classic Beauvoir, containing a highly rational, Symbolic, analysis of the gendered socialisation process which restricts female opportunity, combined with a feminist conclusion that offers a path of female liberation through independence and autonomy. This culminates in the fact that Marguerite is Symbolically-empowered, in control of language, as the final short story bearing her name is a hypodiegetic autobiographical first-person narrative (i.e. Marguerite is explicitly presented as the author of her own story within the collection). In terms of extradiegetic authorship, however, there is a more ambivalent conflict taking place, the outcome of which qualifies the positive ending Beauvoir and others explicitly saw here.[17] Beauvoir condemns the *spirituel* that she identified in *Le Deuxième Sexe* so strongly with the feminine, but her condemnation is both too unequivocal and too ambivalent and she has thrown the baby out with the bathwater, in effacing the feminine along with the spiritual.

The narrative structure is a major key to the content of *Quand prime*. The collection opens and closes with the pair of sisters, Marcelle and Marguerite Drouffe, who attain contrasting degrees of literary success. Their antithetical pairing envelops Anne's narrative structurally and thematically, as the story of 'Marcelle' opens the collection, with Marguerite as a minor character, and later Marcelle reappears obliquely as a minor character, firstly in Anne's story and then in her younger sister Marguerite's story, which closes the collection. This circularity effectively underlines the pair's contrasting literary outputs and the divergent outcomes of their respective relationships with the poet Denis Charval. The fourth story, Anne's *nouvelle,* is the void within which the text threatens to be engulfed, exerting a pull from which it withdraws, and it is significant that despite the tragedy of her fate pointed to by the title (and later editions recast the title as '*Anne, ou quand prime le spirituel*' to promote her centrality), the text does not build towards Anne's story as a culmination, but rather gravitates towards it only to bury it, and then leave it behind. The phonic signification embedded in the coupling of the sisters' names, a sort of sylleptic divergent pairing, reflects the split of their characters.

[16] Shepherd sees Marguerite as 'perhaps the most positive of all Beauvoir's fictional heroines' (2003, 52).
[17] Beauvoir explicitly identified most closely with Marguerite's character and said, '[l]L'histoire de Marguerite – qui était en grande partie celle de mon adolescence – me satisfaisait davantage' (QPS, *préface* 28). Danièle Sallenave similarly saw Marguerite and the younger, more minor female character Andrée, as the two of the six central women who 'font avec lucidité le rude apprentissage de la liberté' (QPS, *Avant-propos* 22).

Starting out from the same root, 'Mar', the older sister is 'celle', the feminine singular demonstrative pronoun with connotations of the anonymous and universalising 'she', and her sibling is 'gueri(t)e' or the woman who is cured, and exactly what she is cured of is another point of ambivalence, as we shall see.

A sensitive, intelligent but impressionable young girl, Marcelle is marked by the poetic early on, as she writes poetry at an early age for her brother Pascal. However, she is soon star-struck by the intellectual men she meets in her great-aunt's bookshop, and becomes a Symbolic devotee, adoring these gods of masculine literature, 'Marcelle les contemplait avec dévotion. Elle souhaitait ardemment qu'un jour l'un d'entre eux l'aperçut et dît d'une voix veloutée: «Comme elle a des lectures sérieuses, cette jolie petite fille!»' (QPS 35). Her early dream of becoming a writer in order to win the right to participate in the conversation of these adored male writers suddenly becomes circumscribed to the self-limiting ambition of simply partnering male genius in the rather incongruous lines, 'Elle pensa à Mme de Staël, à George Eliot, à la comtesse de Noailles. C'est alors que soudain elle eut la merveilleuse révélation de son destin. «Je serai la compagne d'un homme de génie», murmura-t-elle avec extase' (39). The talented but indolent poet she marries, Denis Charval, 'le jeune poète' whose soul is 'ingénue, excessive, capricieuse' (QPS 59) figures the semiotic that both tempts and threatens the woman writer. He has the potential for poetry and revolution, but his poetic potential never bears fruit and he is ultimately rejected by the text as 'un homme de nulle part' (QPS 306), a dead-end leading nowhere but nihilism or self-abnegating suicide. Early on, Marcelle sees in Denis the genius she needs to fulfil her own literary ambitions. Her relationship with him from the outset is characterised as a strict mother bullying a naughty child prodigy to do his homework and realise his potential. He is 'cet enfant sur qui elle veillait maternellement' (QPS 77; also 61, 63) and all her energies are focused on trying to force him to produce some writing: 'elle exigea que Denis lui montrât chaque soir ce qu'il avait écrit dans la journée' (78).

When Marcelle's stranglehold on his creativity drives him away, Marguerite follows him, laying the foundation for the transference of the relationship of woman writer to semiotic-poetic to the younger sister, which becomes the focus of the final story. At the moment of abandonment, Marcelle at first almost faces emotional collapse, 'ma vie est finie' (QPS 87) she feels, but the sense of being 'délivrée' or relieved of the burden of Denis' genius restores her and she appears to draw strength from the idea of self-sufficiency, '«Il ne me reste plus que

moi», dit Marcelle; elle ferma les yeux; il lui semblait, comme au retour d'un long exil, se retrouver elle-même. Elle se revoyait' (87) and there follows a series of three sentences anaphorically linked by this last phrase, as the chapter closes on a note of utter optimism and confidence:

> Jamais plus elle ne serait tentée de se fuir. Une grande exaltation la souleva, elle se redressa et marcha vers la fenêtre; d'un geste brusque, elle tira les rideaux. Elle ne devait pas chercher hors d'elle-même le sens de la vie; elle était délivrée de l'amour [...] tout était bien [...] un jour des inconnus, des frères, comprendraient enfin son âme désincarnée et la chériraient [...] déjà elle sentait en elle l'aurore des poèmes sublimes. Pour la seconde fois elle eut la merveilleuse révélation de son destin. «Je suis une femme de génie», décida-t-elle. (QPS 88)

The insistence on self-discovery, in the repetition of Marcelle seeing herself in 'elle se revoyait', the determination no longer to 'se fuir', and the brusk gesture of pulling back the curtains separating her from the world appear empowering. However, the moment is deeply equivocal, as the concreteness of self-presencing jars with her ideal of being cherished as a disembodied entity, 'son âme désincarnée'.[18] Indeed, the moment's self-empowering optimism and ambition are entirely negated in the later *nouvelles,* which return to the days following this moment and it transpires that almost immediately following Denis' departure Marcelle is prostrate, 'elle s'est alitée' (305). Her assertive stance is reduced to a diminished passivity. Nonetheless, it is important to retain the idea that at this point in the development of the collection, there is an aspiring woman writer full of optimism and ambition, even if that ambition resides in a woman desiring disconnection from her corporeal physicality in 'son âme désincarnée'.

This disconnection, the dis-embodiment from the feminine, is enacted through the sacrifice of Anne Vignon. It is through Anne that the madwoman, and the semiotic, flicker and burst into full flame before being extinguished. Anne is a young woman profoundly conflicted between her desire for sexual, emotional and intellectual freedom, and her duty to the patriarchal religious ideology represented by her mother, Mme Vignon (as were Beauvoir and Zaza, to differing degrees). The voices of conflicting social forces – religious, pseudo-feminist,

[18] The word *âme* appears nineteen times in Marcelle's story, out of a total of fifty-five times in the whole text.

and patriarchal represented respectively by her mother, Chantal Plattard and her beloved Pascal Drouffe – attempt to bend Anne to their will, engaging in a battle that leaves her utterly exhausted. Anne is a figure of sacrificed potential, or otherwise put, a potential madwoman sacrificed. Her potential is that of genuine female, and feminine, resistance to the patriarchal Symbolic – symbolised in her emerging madness, which is suppressed and silenced at the moment it threatens expression. If, as I have argued in the Introduction, the three means of escaping or resisting socio-linguistic hegemonic Symbolic structures are isolation (exile), madness or death, Anne is seen progressively characterised by each of these both voluntarily and involuntarily.

There are brief glimpses of Anne's semiotic potential before her story's final scene of excessive behaviour, soon after which she is suppressed by the text. These early incidents are solitary moments of stolen freedom or illicit *errance* which earn Anne the interpellation 'folle' (QPS 216; 220; 242), and which in each instance threaten her subjectivity and her existence. In the first, the borders of her being become blurred as she leaves a formal social picnic for a solitary swim, 'une forme confuse se débattait dans la rivière' (216), and her mother calls her 'folle' for the simple act of swimming alone. Later, when she sneaks out of her house one night with her friend Chantal so they can speak freely, the women are locked out, exiled from the social, 'On va nous prendre pour deux folles' (241), she predicts, and in order to break back in they must climb a dauntingly high wall. Anne, alone of the two daring enough to brave the obstacle, slips, and her life hangs in the balance, 'elle resta un moment suspendue dans le vide' (QPS 242). This *vide* threatens to engulf Anne in her moment of mad, stubborn isolation, and we recall Beauvoir's mix of pride and fear at her own mad, 'solitude tenace' (MJF 361), as we detect the simultaneous attraction and repulsion this *vide* exerts on the text and on Beauvoir's *écriture*, which itself at this point hangs 'suspendue dans le vide' and hesitating in its attitude towards the semiotic between this attraction and repulsion. An earlier incident in the *nouvelle* where Anne intentionally cuts her foot with an axe to avoid a stifling social excursion illustrates the death-driven force of her repressed anger and frustration, which turns inward and impels her to self-mutilation.[19] It is a proleptic nod to Anne's ultimate self-destructive resignation to the *vide*. It is also a failed attempt at disarticulation (the failure to

[19] This story, taken from Zaza's life, is re-told later in *Mémoires*. It also reflects the great extent to which women's protests are turned on themselves, something Beauvoir discussed explicitly in her analysis of anorexia and self-harm in *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

sever the foot), which becomes an important motif in the texts of Santos and Lê, where disarticulation is achieved, with metaphoric significance.

The final, fatal moment of madness comes when Anne is utterly despairing and exhausted from the perpetual battle against her mother to win any sort of liberty, 'J'ai lutté, dit Anne, vous ne pouvez pas savoir combien j'ai lutté' (QPS 236) and 'pour chacun des livres que j'ai lus, chaque sortie, chaque pensée, j'ai lutté' (239). At this point it is Pascal Drouffe's affection for his sister Marcelle, the (aspiring) woman writer, that prevents his union with Anne, and if we read Anne as a semiotic figure and Pascal as figuring Symbolic language, schematically the woman writer's (Marcelle's) intimate, incestuous relationship with Symbolic language results in the exclusion, madness and suppression of the semiotic and the feminine. It is when Anne goes to see Marcelle to beg her to release Pascal that Anne's madness erupts in climactic excess. Anne's semiotic madness bursts into full force as she confronts Marcelle, the aspiring woman writer, who sees only the threat, 'il y avait dans l'air une menace insupportable qui n'attendait que le silence pour se préciser' (QPS 268). Marcelle fails to understand, fails to see the full import of what is confronting her, and dismissively reassures herself by concluding, '«elle est folle», pensa Marcelle et elle se sentit plus calme' (ibid.). The semiotic promise and threat presented by Anne cannot be reconciled and 'ce visage était trop affreux' (QPS 270) for Marcelle on the level of character, and for Beauvoir on the level of author. Defeated, Anne 's'affaissa' then collapses, taking Marcelle's hand before retreating into semiotic silence, 'Ensuite elle retomba dans le silence, elle paraissait épuisée' (269).

The text then performs a deeply paradoxical act of suppression of the very event that motivated its conception, as the actual moment of Anne's death is represented by a narrative ellipsis, marked only by a gap in the flow of printed language, an asterisk and the ironic line, 'La mort d'Anne fut une surprise' (QPS 271). In this, Terry Keefe's conclusion that 'far too little is made of Anne's death [...] there is a void rather than a fascinating mystery at the heart of the story' (1983, 144) is apposite. Beauvoir's text moves to conceal this 'visage trop affreux' that it cannot tolerate and the void itself is consigned to silence along with Anne. Beauvoir's 1979 preface expresses a sense of failure at her attempt to 'faire revivre' Anne/Zaza, 'j'avais tout à fait manqué le récit de [...] la mort de Zaza' (QPS 28) and this sense of failure can be seen as the recognition of a sense of loss beyond the simple structural or literary failure of the narrative. Keefe concludes that 'we have no reason for identifying particularly strongly with Anne' (1983, 144). Although we are invited to sympathise strongly with Anne, as the narrative

describes in detail her arduous battle for freedom and/of expression, what may lead Keefe to his conclusion is the exceptional opacity of Anne's character, bereft as she is of the first-person voice, in contrast to almost all other central female characters who are opened to us through *style indirect libre*, diary entries or first-person narrative. Our only direct access to Anne's thoughts is, significantly, through speech in the dialogue attributed to her. In fact, the story of her life and the expression of her turmoil in the diary the reader is never given access to, are overwritten, edited and rewritten by her mother (and proleptically also by Chantal who imagines one day writing Anne's story). The madwoman is severed from the first-person *je* and from writing.

What of the writing woman? With the sacrifice performed, the writing woman comes into being, and the subsequent, concluding *nouvelle* is Marguerite's autobiographical first-person narrative of coming into being as an emancipated woman writer. Before we consider the nature of that triumph, it is worth briefly considering the second telling of Anne/Zaza's story. Twenty years after *Quand prime* was written, and rejected, Beauvoir was to reproduce the dynamic of woman-writer-predicated-on-female-sacrifice with the story of Zaza in *Mémoires*, the first volume of her autobiography. There Zaza is explicitly the female alter ego for the young Beauvoir, and the role of dutiful daughter in the title shifts from Beauvoir, who goes on to rebel completely against her family's values, to Zaza, whose youthful insouciance is overcome by her strict Catholic upbringing and her mother's rigid hold over her life, in a way analagous to *Quand prime*'s Anne, who is also closely identified with the domestic and the feminine world of conventional women. Anne's sanctified martyrdom fictionally predicts Zaza's tragic fate, which is explicitly presented as the sacrifice necessary for the life of the woman author, the price to be paid for Beauvoir's Symbolic existence: 'Ensemble nous avions lutté contre le destin fangeux qui nous guettait et j'ai pensé longtemps que j'avais payé ma liberté de sa mort' (MJF 503).

The 'destin fangeux' here is usually read as the oppressive, domesticated fate of most women of the time, destined for marriage and motherhood, which Beauvoir escapes but Zaza is unable to. However, the miry destiny Beauvoir avoids (and Zaza is sacrificed into) is the sticky, murky viscerality of the feminine, and the semiotic. There is an illuminating oppositional identification in *Mémoires* between Beauvoir and Zaza on the one hand and on the other, the fictional characters Théagène and Euphorion from André Laurie's *L'Écolier d'Athènes* (MJF 158). The mature Beauvoir writes how her thirteen-year-old self identified

with the deserving Théagène (the Greek grammarian and philosopher) while seeing Zaza as the talented Euphorion (a Greek *poet*) who meets an early death, leaving Théagène-Simone to tell their story, 'il était la mémoire et la conscience, le Sujet essentiel. Si on m'avait proposé d'être Zaza, j'aurais refusé' (ibid.).[20] This anecdote sets Beauvoir up as the 'grammarian', the supposedly objective rule-driven (Symbolic) writing woman who is memory and conscience for both girls, but one who refuses identification with the poetic, and arguably survives only as a result of the other's erasure.

This dynamic is played out in the culmination of the woman writer's *bildungsroman* in *Quand prime*'s final story, 'Marguerite'. The syllepsis of the Drouffe sisters is completed here, through Marguerite's relationship with her older sister's husband, Denis Charval. Having abandoned religion as a young girl, Marguerite feels a vacuum, which she fills initially with literature and learning. A cerebral creature, things of the flesh repel her, and '[l]es joies intellectuelles étaient les seules que je consentisse encore à goûter' (QPS 293). Denis appears as a guide, a gatekeeper to a world she glimpses but has not been able to enter alone:

> Je restais comme à la surface des choses, une surface nue, sans poésies et sans promesses, parce que je n'esquissais jamais aucune action pour pénétrer plus intimement en elles: Denis m'a fait soupçonner qu'elles contenaient des richesses cachées, mais j'avais si peu l'habitude de la liberté que je ne pensais pas pouvoir jamais me les approprier; j'étais dans la vie comme une visiteuse qui n'ose toucher à rien [...] seul Denis paraissait chez lui et c'était à lui qu'il fallait s'adresser pour obtenir la clef qui ouvre toutes les portes. (QPS 297)

Without poetry her promise can never be fulfilled, she will never 'see into the life of things' (Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey' 1798), and only Denis appears to offer access to the full understanding that comes with opening 'toutes les portes'. The path he offers, however, is

[20] *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* at *Oxfordreference.com* http://www.oxfordreference.com/search?siteToSearch=aup&q=Theagenes&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true and http://www.oxfordreference.com/search?siteToSearch=aup&q=Euphorion&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true [Accessed 9/10/2014].

characterised in *Quand prime* as linguistically barren and nihilistic, and leads to contemplating self-annihilation, and Denis offers a dead end as 'un homme de nulle part' (QPS 306). This atopia is presented here as negative, in contrast to the positive opportunity for discovery it is seen as offering in the writing of Linda Lê, as we shall see in Chapters Four and Five. Like Marcelle, Marguerite is seduced by the dream of living through Denis' genius, but her union with him is notably asexual and their relationship remains somewhat superficial, never achieving the sexual or emotional intimacy of his bond with Marcelle.

When Denis skulks back to his wife, Marguerite unexpectedly responds with relief, laughing at the absurdity of the situation, in contrast to Marcelle's depressive slump after her own loss of the failed poet(ic) in her life. Beauvoir's text directs us to see Marguerite's final position as positive and empowered, as she is *guéri(t)e* or cured of the *spirituel* and her dependence on the male, able to see the world unveiled of the previous allegorical artifice Denis imbued it with, and ready to become an intellectually-emancipated woman writer. The Symbolic sister, free of semiotic complications, can take up the pen. Liberated from Denis, she is now free to (re)discover herself, 'le monde brillait comme un sou neuf [...] tout était possible puisque au centre des choses, à cette place que Denis avait laissé vide, voici que je me trouvais moi-même' (QPS 357). This last phrase strongly echoes that describing Marcelle's supposed moment of self-revelation in the first *nouvelle*, 'il lui semblait [...] se retrouver elle-même' (87), and the similarity strikes an uneasy chord, underlining the parallel between these two moments even as it seeks to differentiate the two women. We realise that Marguerite's positive ending is qualified by the fact that her liberation is achieved by default, as it is not she who breaks with Denis but he who leaves, to reunite with Marcelle, the more poetically-aligned, semiotic, incarnation of the woman writer. On another level, therefore, Marguerite's cure is also a loss, as she is bereft of the semiotic potential this poetic figure offered. She can navigate the world alone, and write for herself, but we realise this is only because of the doors he opened for her. The 'sou neuf' in the line quoted above is a telling metaphor. The shiny new coin speaks of the hermetic, thetic solidity of metal representing currency with an exchange value, not an intrinsic aesthetic value. Marguerite sees the 'real' world, removed of the false ideologies of the *spirituel* of the title so harmful to women, but also robbed of its poetry and the sensual beauty offered by an emotional artistic sensitivity.

The story we are reading, bearing her own name, is Marguerite's fictionally autobiographical text. The woman writer that Beauvoir places at the culmination of her *roman*

d'apprentissage is one empowered with the first-person position *not* marked by madness, writing her own story and her self into language. That self is poetically-bereft and a subject shining with the closed solidity of a new penny – far from the *sujet-en-procès* Kristeva imagines, offering openness and possibility – and somehow the model Beauvoir is at pains to construct is a shiny fiction covering over the dark hole at its centre. Marguerite's more poetically-inclined older sister, Marcelle, signals yet again the semiotic impoverishment in operation in the course of this text. Following her reunion with Denis she has managed to write, but is only a minor poet producing 'une petite plaquette de vers' (QPS 357). I use the terms impoverishment, and suppression, so as not to foreclose the poetic, as Beauvoir has not. Poetry is not eradicated entirely, just as *Quand prime* was not destroyed completely. The slim *plaquette* suggests the possibility of semiotic reinvigoration, however unlikely at this point. I shall argue in Chapter Two that the poetic returns, along with the madwoman, in Beauvoir's later works of fiction.

I return briefly to the optimism so palpable at the close of the first story, which imagines Marcelle's self-projection as a creative woman. What occurs in the text that so utterly erodes this supposedly confident self-assertion? To answer this it is instructive to look at the contradictory treatment of the themes of sexuality and movement, which are alternative vectors of women's freedom of linguistic expression, in the freedom of sexual expression and the freedom of physical movement. *Quand prime* is arguably Beauvoir's most sexual text. It is sexually explicit and erotic in a way rarely encountered in her other fiction. It also flirts with what would have been seen in 1930s France as sexual deviance, in the mildly masochistic couplings of Marcelle and Denis; homo-erotic tensions between the teacher Chantal and her pupils; Lisa's mild nymphomania, sexual delirium and explicit masturbation; Marguerite's narrowly-avoided rape and her attempted seduction by the bisexual Marie-Ange. While Beauvoir wrote with unsentimental frankness about women's sexual realities in general in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, discussing such taboo issues as lesbianism and abortion among others, her fiction after *Quand prime* is largely devoid of eroticism or sexual intimacy. She was to say at the end of her career that the one thing she regretted not writing about was her own sexuality:

> I would have liked to have given a frank and balanced account of my own sexuality. A truly sincere one, from a feminist point of view; I would like to tell women about my life in

> terms of my own sexuality because it is not just a personal matter but a political one too. I did not write about it at the time because I did not appreciate the importance of this question, nor the need for personal honesty. (Schwarzer 1984, 84-5)

Beauvoir was perhaps most courageously personal and intimate in terms of writing women's sexuality in this first text, and it is significant that it was a risk she did not take again in this way in her fiction.

There are three key antitheses attesting to the text's ambivalence regarding feminine sexuality in its particular manifestations of lesbian homosexuality and the maternal, both identified with the semiotic by Kristeva, and this underscores the semiotic repression at its core. These are in the contrast between Lisa's early masturbation scene and Marguerite's refusal to be seduced by the bisexual or lesbian character Marie-Ange near the end; the contrasting reactions in the second story of the characters Chantal and Andrée to Monique's pregnancy; and the contrasting attitudes of the pair of Drouffe sisters towards their own sexuality and the differing nature of their sexual relationships with Denis.

The most erotic, sensual and, crucially, also the most poetic scene in the text, comes at the end of Lisa's *nouvelle*. This is one of the most aesthetically beautiful moments in Beauvoir's writing. Lisa's cloistered existence as a student teacher in a Catholic girl's school is an example of the false liberty offered at the time by the profession of teaching. Teaching enabled women to avoid domestic confinement only to re-enclose them in an alternative confinement of academic institutionalisation that essentially dried up their sexuality, leaving them withered and disconnected from their sexuality like Chantal's teaching colleagues, these 'vieilles filles desséchées' (QPS 96). Lisa, twenty years of age and a virgin, takes refuge in romantic fantasy and sexual delirium, and her unexpected explicit masturbation scene approaches the image of the eroticised hysteric of Charcot's invention. The language is poetic, seductive and itself almost delirious in its repetitively rhythmic lyricism, linguistically aping the sexual performance under way. Lisa fantasises an encounter with Pascal Drouffe, who she too is infatuated with:

> Les mains de Pascal effleurent les cheveux, le cou, beau cristal évaporé, tiède haleine, des mains répandues sur la chair secrète, mains d'archange descendant lentement le long d'une tendre victime, ta main chair frissonnante, ta chère main d'archange bien-aimé;

> bien-aimé, bien-aimé (sic). La main de Lisa a laissé tomber dans le cendrier la cigarette et s'est glissée sous la soie du pyjama; elle ne sent plus son bras, sa main n'est plus la sienne et les douces muqueuses humides tressaillent sous la caresse de ces doigts étrangers. Ta chère main d'archange bien-aimé, bien-aimé. (QPS 199)

A powerfully harmonious coincidence of content, language and imagery sees the petals of the faded flower Lisa has worn all day, symbolic of her withering femininity, fall over her 'en pluie légère' (ibid.) in a metonym of self-touching to match the account of her own hand slipping under her silk pyjamas. There is assonance, alliteration, chiasmic homophony (main chair/chère main), repetition, sibilance, and erotic suggestion in the language here. It is an almost perfectly semiotic moment, and radically uncharacteristic of Beauvoir's corpus.[21] Beauvoir's writing has unbuttoned itself and envisaged a moment of sublime and feminine touching self-love, with poetic effect. Her text is seduced by the expression of its own semiotic potential, which it then moves to suppress. Immediately following this passage's loosening of the Symbolic corset comes Anne's story, in which Anne's sexuality is constantly frustrated by Pascal's refusal to kiss her until his tame peck on her forehead right before her death. The self-loving moment in Lisa's masturbation then turns to revulsion in Marguerite's story, which comes after Anne's sacrifice. Eros and Thanatos are both expressed and repressed around this hinge moment of the female sacrifice.

Sexuality is not entirely expunged from the text at this point, but whereas before the pivotal moment of Anne's death the woman writer is a desiring, sexual subject symbolised by Marcelle's highly physical sexual relationship with Denis, thereafter the woman writer, Marguerite, is repulsed by the physical and becomes a creature apparently devoid of drives or desires. Marcelle's connection with Denis' poetic figure liberates her sexuality, and their sexual couplings are erotic and explicit. Marguerite's own sexuality and physicality horrify her, with all the ambivalence of fascination and fear that horror implies, 'Je me faisais horreur [...] le visage suant et vêtue de taffetas épinard; et puis je détestais l'état où me mettait la danse [...] je sentais dans mon corps une langueur brûlante qui me laissait tout écœurée lorsqu'elle s'évanouissait' (QPS 293). Her bond with Denis is never consummated, and the attraction is intellectual rather than sexual.

[21] Of Beauvoir's corpus, in its language and style the story is most similar to 'Monologue', the second of the triptych in *La Femme rompue,* which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Just over ten pages before the end of the collection there is a final act of semiotic suppression. Marie-Ange, the older woman who is Denis's mistress, has become increasingly tactile and flirtatious and finally entices a nervous Marguerite to stay the night under false pretences. The young *ingénue* finds herself wearing the older woman's silk pyjamas, and the symbolic garb of eroticism is transferred from Lisa's story to Marguerite's. As Marie-Ange begins caressing the naïve younger woman in total darkness, Marguerite responds by clenching, stiffening, but not immediately resisting, and indeed she lies still while the other woman's hands roam freely over her for a full half hour before rebuffing her kiss when she apparently finally realises that Marie-Ange wants to sleep with her. The seduction is both a temptation and a source of revulsion, and Marguerite describes her sense of self-reproach, 'J'étais furieuse contre elle, contre moi, je trouvais cette scène odieuse' (QPS 347). Marguerite is repulsed by Marie-Ange, but also by her own attraction, and Marie-Ange highlights Marguerite's paradoxical conduct, '«Pourquoi m'avez-vous laissée vous embrasser, vous caresser, pendant tout ce temps?»' (ibid.). The sexual touch of woman on woman here is refused and repugnant, in constrast to Lisa's *jouissance*, and the revolutionary potential of the lesbian embrace is repressed.

The crisis pregnancy of Monique Fournier offers us a further expression of revulsion towards the viscerality of female biology and also towards the maternal – which for Kristeva is bound up with the semiotic. Superficially, Monique's pregnancy serves to underline the contrast between her best friend Andrée Lacombe and their teacher Chantal Plattard, characters aligned with opposite sides of the *spirituel* fence: Chantal's hypocritical refusal to help the young girl she had encouraged to regard her as a confidante is grounded in moral outrage and pitted against Andrée's pragmatic suggestion that the solution for Monique is to have an abortion. Again, so far, so Beauvoir. However, beneath this obvious antithesis lies a revealing similarity in the language and attitude of the two women that surprisingly aligns them in their revulsion of the semiotic. Andrée's response to the physical reality of her friend's pregnant state is an 'immense écœurement' and the foetus is parasitic, 'une mystérieuse pourriture [...] il y avait quelque chose d'informe et de vivant qui enflait à chaque minute' (QPS 153). Her response goes beyond her avowed desire to save Monique from her unpleasant, violent boyfriend Serge. Andrée's solution, immediate and unhesitating, is to

destroy the foetus, and eradicate the condition of maternity.[22] For Chantal, it is the entire situation – unmarried sex, pregnancy and the suggestion of abortion – that makes her recoil in similar disgust, '«Mon Dieu! Quelle boue!» dit-elle d'une voix atterrée' (158). The muddy 'boue' of the fate to which the pregnancy condemns Monique recalls the miry 'destin fangeux' which Beauvoir describes in *Mémoires* being so relieved to have escaped. The fact that this attitude is held by the character of Andrée, who is invested with the projection of the future intellectual woman, with her 'indépendance d'esprit' (QPS 115; 132), foreshadows the future disposition of Beauvoir's writing project from this point – until the return of the madwoman in her final two fiction texts.

A further set of contrasts and antitheses splits the text along the vector of physical mobility, and there is a web of significance woven through the women characters' freedom of movement, or lack thereof. Descriptions of wandering or *errance* contrast markedly with Antigonal *enfermement* – metonymic of the freedom of movement or domestic/academic restrictions experienced by the six central women characters and also symbolic of their various intellectual states and attitudes. Lisa is suffocating in her cell-like room in the cloistered asceticism of the Catholic school where she teaches, suspended in a sort of living death where, 'Dormir est meilleur' (QPS 198). Similar to Anne's illicit excursions mentioned earlier, Lisa's outings are transgressive, and won through deceit, and once outside she engages in a form of *errance délirante* making her a proto-*folle flâneuse,* which becomes a major motif in the writing of Linda Lê. The realist mode of the collection here cedes to the fantastical mode that is amplified in Santos and Lê's writing, a mode beyond both the spiritual and the real. Anne, as we have seen, is similarly marked by an oscillation between domestic confinement and illicit, isolated wandering, and of all the characters, hers is the only *errance* that is truly marked by, or marked as, madness, and she is the only character killed off in the text, and the furthest distanced from the first-person speaking position.

The text's schismic presentation of movement is not confined to the liberty/constraint binary, and the text contrasts how characters employ their freedom of movement. Chantal and Andrée's oppositional pairing is firmly underlined by the contrasting characterisation of their wandering: Chantal's predictable 'flânerie' (QPS 104) of safe, well-trodden and

[22] The motif of abortion becomes a central one in the writing of Emma Santos, metaphorically symbolizing the involuntary destruction of that writer's foetal semiotic linguistic disposition by socio-Symbolic forces, as I shall discuss in Chapter Three.

conventional paths both physically and intellectually is as self-limiting as Marcelle's early literary ambition to be a writer's companion. She dares not stray beyond the arc of influence of Rougemont's cathedral spire, and frequents the twee café on the cathedral square. Andrée, conversely, engages in true *errance* as a journey of discovery, which takes her far from the spire's arrogant authority and down to the quays, 'pour decouvrir une odeur' (121), to have her senses and intellect awoken. The movement towards water here recalls Anne straying towards the river, the fluidity of which threatened the borders of her subjectivity. At the close, Andrée's wandering takes her again to the quays, 'elle les longea jusqu'à la sortie de la ville; elle marcha longtemps; elle ne fuyait pas, elle ne cherchait rien [...] elle était seule et elle avait peur' (QPS 165)'. Although it may be edifying, Andrée's directionless wandering leads to isolation and fear, and this fear felt by the solitary *femme errante* is a marked characteristic of the madwomen we encounter later, beginning with Monique in 'La Femme rompue' and amplified in the writing of Emma Santos. Straying from the path of conformity is an isolating, terrifying experience. At the end of her journey, however, where Andrée arrives is face to face with her own reflection, which raises questions in relation to the value of her *errance*, as we shall see.

Of the Drouffe sisters, while both enjoy relative freedom of movement, Marguerite is the character whose *errance* is depicted as liberating, consistent with the narrative's erection of her as the model emancipated woman writer. Marcelle ends up 'alitée' (305), prostrate in powerless immobility. Marguerite, by contrast, once unshackled from her 'guide' Denis, bereft of the gravitational centre of her world, takes to the night streets of Paris once more, 'Je ne savais plus où aller; une énorme masse grouillante et amorphe s'étendait autour de moi; j'ai suivi des rues, au hasard; mes pensées aussi erraient à l'aventure, c'était un faible tourbillon qui ne conduisait nulle part' (354-5). *Errance* here promises 'l'aventure' – a promise taken up by Linda Lê's writing project privileging 'les aventuriers de l'absolu' (Schwerdtner 2013, 313), but foreclosed here by Beauvoir. The compass with which Marguerite re-orients herself to avoid the dead-end of this 'nulle part' is her own self-image and she replaces Denis with herself at the centre of things, 'au centre des choses, à cette place que Denis avait laissée vide, voici que je me trouvais moi-même' (QPS 357). There is a difference between discovery that looks outward and a journey with the self as its destination: self-awareness may lead us to look beyond ourselves or alternatively leave us gazing only at our own image.

The echo between four major scenes of apparent self-awareness or self-discovery undermines the emancipatory quality of the final moment involving Marguerite. Marcelle, Marguerite, Chantal and Andrée each come to a remarkably similar moment close to the end of their stories, where they see themselves or find themselves, as some sort of solution to a particular problem. The moment in which Marguerite's *bildung* appears to reach apotheosis, 'voici que je me trouvais moi-même' (357), is unmistakably reminiscent of the false moment of Marcelle's ambitious declaration, 'il lui semblait, comme au retour d'un long exil, se retrouver elle-même' and the insistent triple repetition of the phrase, 'Elle se revoyait' (QPS 87). The fact that this strikingly similar moment is shared not only by her sister, whose liberation has in fact been undone, but also by Chantal, the hypocritical, smug, self-deceiving character whose status in the text is lowest (apart from perhaps Mme Vignon), destabilizes and equivocates the optimistically liberating chord we are invited to see struck as the narrative closes. Looking into her deludedly-devoted pupils' eyes, Chantal sees 'au fond de deux yeux noirs sa propre image devenue déjà légendaire' (QPS 163). Andrée, three pages later, seeing her image in the café mirror, 'sourit à cette image qui lui rendit très exactement son sourire' (166), and it is perhaps the extent to which this 'très exactement' recalls the 'sou neuf' of Marguerite's new world that alerts us to the closed, thetic, Symbolic subjectivity being instantiated in this text (contrasting with Anne's fluid borders). Writing may be a mirror Marguerite holds up with her first-person narrative as a means to self-awareness, but we see how writing may lead to alienation into a potentially false image. The two central women characters not presented in such a moment of self-confrontation are Lisa and Anne, as the mad, semiotic and uncertain potential of their figures cannot be captured by Beauvoir's mirror, and is instead engulfed by the void and veiled in the dark hole at the core of the shiny 'sou neuf'.

Symbolic Rejection of Beauvoir's 'Silly Girls'

Quand prime le spirituel ends on a note of confidence and optimism, the woman writer emerges, writing the world for herself – 'il a fallu tout réinventer moi-même' (357) – but perhaps the tone is too confident, too optimistic. What I have described in my analysis above is not an anxiety of female authorship, but rather how Beauvoir's ambivalence towards her own sex and gender operates a semiotic repression through the sacrifice of the feminine

figure of the (potential) madwoman, in order to instantiate the Symbolic woman writer. Any anxiety of female authorship is repressed along with the madwoman's suppression. Crucially, the madwoman, the woman writer and the first-person female voice are dis-united here, and so the madwoman is not given a voice, and the anxiety she promises (or threatens) to speak of is not fully expressed, along with the potential within Beauvoir's *écriture* for a radically new, more feminine, more semiotically-charged linguistic disposition. There are two main reasons this text is so important. Firstly, because of the semiotic repression I have described, with the glimpse we are offered both of the madwoman and of the semiotic potential of Beauvoir's writing. Secondly, because of factors external to the text itself, in its reception by the publishing world, and the effect this had on the development of Beauvoir's voice.

By Beauvoir's own admission, Marguerite's self-assertive declaration closing the text is a *mise-en-abyme* of the author's own first complete literary declaration of intellectual and authorial coming into being – a declaration that is subsequently silenced and locked in a drawer for forty years. Far from the failure described in the pejorative terms of Beauvoir's preface, for Danièle Sallenave *Quand prime* is one of Beauvoir's most successful works:

> Le lecteur qui découvre aujourd'hui ce livre a du mal à penser non seulement qu'il ait pu être refusé, mais que son édition tardive soit passée relativement inaperçue. Maîtrise du récit, liberté du ton, force de la satire, complexité de sa composition, humour [...] alacrité de la plume, justesse et férocité des portraits et du regard sur soi: cet ensemble de cinq récits est probablement l'un des ouvrages les plus réussis de son auteur. (QPS, *avant-propos* 13).

Bair similarly contends that, 'its importance at the time she wrote it is almost incalculable' (1990, 206), and Sartre also had high praise for stories that were 'remarkable documents which conveyed the reality of women's situation with starkness, bleakness, passion and conviction' and for 'Castor's ability to show the world what it is really like to be a woman' (Bair, ibid.). Bair chronicles the optimism and excitement Beauvoir felt at the prospect of being published, and how she was confident enough in the collection's worth to allow Sartre to submit them to Brice Parain at Gallimard, even how 'she told her parents and friends that Gallimard would probably be publishing the book very soon' (1990, 206). This enthusiasm and

excitement contrast markedly from the critical comments prefacing the text on eventual publication, and what happened in between is significant.

Gallimard rejected the manuscript, and the terms of the rejection and her response thereto are described by Beauvoir in her own words, which are worth quoting at length:

> Sartre told me that [Brice Parain said] it really had nothing to do with me or the quality of my writing, but that the house of Gallimard did not understand books written by women which were about the lives of women of my generation and background; that modern France and French publishing were not yet ready to deal with what women thought and felt and wanted; that to publish such a book would brand them a subversive publishing house and they couldn't risk offending all sorts of patrons and critics. Sartre told me not to worry, there were other houses [...] and we would try them next. And he told me not to say anything negative about Gallimard, because they were so powerful and he needed them and perhaps with my next novel I would too. So I kept my mouth shut and swallowed the hurt and told everyone the book was poorly written and because it dealt with silly girls it would probably not have sold anyway. (Bair 207-8)

This astonishing quotation reveals the extraordinary sexism at work in literary and cultural spheres at the time. The failure of the patriarchal institution with control over the dissemination of language to understand the feminine results in the suppression of that feminine from language – the phallocentric Symbolic silences the semiotic. Indeed, the woman author denigrates her own skills – her own self and indeed the feminine *tout court* – because of the publisher's limitations and lack of vision. The woman author is made to see women as 'silly girls' and writing in a frank and intimate way about what women *really* thought and felt and wanted, in all its messy complexity, as a subversive activity that would be rejected, which for a woman who desperately wanted to be taken seriously intellectually would have been profoundly undermining.

Her collection of short stories was a tentative first step for Beauvoir, as she approached thirty years of age, into the world of letters which she saw as male and masculine, a world in which she desperately wanted to belong, and on which she had gambled her whole future, having rejected the security of home and hearth, marriage and motherhood. Beauvoir had abandoned almost every value and truth of her milieu in order to build her own life, and that life centred on being a writer. The manuscript's rejection, representing exclusion from this

literary world, was devastating. Beauvoir may have stated much later, with the luxury of the confidence of her extremely successful position in 1979, that 'mon échec ne me découragea pas car je l'estimais assez justifié et j'avais l'avenir devant moi' (QPS, *préface* 28). At the time, however, the effect on this young, aspiring woman writer was desolating. In an almost uncannily similar fulfilment of the fictional desolation of the aspiring woman writer in which 'Marcelle s'est alitée' (QPS 305), as Bair describes, 'Beauvoir took to her bed [...] she grew despondent and lay in bed creating vivid scenarios of her own personal and professional failures, contrasting them with Sartre's successes' (208).

This effect was reinforced by Grasset's rejection, this time, in a bewildering contradiction of Gallimard's criticism, for lacking originality (Bair 209). Beauvoir refused to submit the manuscript to other publishers and felt 'a failure and for a long time viewed [herself] as unworthy' (ibid.). The blow sent the text into a forty-year coma, and can be seen to have had a major effect on the development of Beauvoir's fiction. If Beauvoir had doubts previously about the risks of exploring the more semiotic and more feminine aspects of her Imaginary and her voice, those doubts were now unequivocally confirmed. These external circumstances in the context of her writing transmute her ambivalence into an anxiety of female authorship, one that is overcome by a strategy of symbiosis or masculinization of her narratives and her narrative voice. Beauvoir was already in the early stages of writing *L'Invitée* when *Quand prime* was rejected, and at this point the novel was to have taken a strikingly different direction, far more focused on the author's early life and more similar to *Quand prime* than the text that ultimately emerged (Bair 1990, Chapters 15; 16). Having been told that to write fiction foregrounding the feminine, female subjectivity and desire in this frank, unmediated way was unacceptable, Beauvoir set about writing the type of text that would be more acceptable to publishers, and the result is an increasing masculinisation of voice and content in her succeeding novels, and her working title for *L'Invitée*, 'the Françoise and Pierre novel', is an immediate reflection of this (Bair 212).

Quand prime hints at this strategy of symbiotic linguistic or artistic hermaphroditism.[23] Embedded within Marguerite's *nouvelle* is the suggestion of symbiosis between Denis and Marie-Ange. Their union is apparently mutually necessary for these two artists to achieve creative expression, which eludes them otherwise. Marie-Ange has an artistic temperament

[23] It is also important to highlight this motif in view of the centrality that hermaphroditism and linguistic symbiosis play in the work of Linda Lê, as we shall see in Chapters Four and Five.

and creative ideas, but no means of expression open to her and she is, 'en quelque sorte un être mutilé' (QPS 324). To relieve this mutilation she needs to have Denis 'sous la main'. He in turn appears artistically dependent on Marie-Ange, who boasts, '«Lui aussi, pour qu'il produisît quelque chose, il lui fallait l'impulsion de cette force créatrice qui est en moi [...] *une symbiose*' (325; my emphasis). Little more is made of this symbiosis in the plot of *Quand prime*, except for two consequences in Denis' relationships with the Drouffe sisters. When Marguerite rebuffs Marie-Ange's sexual advances, Marie-Ange severs her symbiosis with Denis, who slinks back to his wife Marcelle, thus triggering Marguerite's liberation. In terms of causality, therefore, it is Marguerite's rejection of homosexual openness that eventually results in her liberation from, and her loss of, her troubled poetic guide. Her semiotic closure leads to poetic loss.

Beauvoir would later insist, 'At the moment of their emancipation, women have a need to write their own histories' (Jardine 1979, 234). The considerable autobiographical content of *Quand prime* makes clear that Beauvoir had a need, from the beginning of her career, to write her own story, and also the stories of the women around her from their own (divergent, diverse) point(s) of view. It was a desire underpinning her writing all her life and would see her return in various generic guises to the same story, whether through the theoretical essay *Le Deuxième Sexe* or the numerous volumes of autobiography. We might speculate that, had these early feminocentric *nouvelles* not been rejected, Beauvoir's corpus may have developed along very different lines. Had her context been different, had she received encouragements rather than rejections at crucial moments, the poetic potential of *Quand prime*, so gloriously probed in 'Lisa', might have seen the 'petite plaquette de vers' (357) transformed into a magnificent, revolutionary song. While she was not discouraged from writing, it is my contention that Beauvoir, at a moment when, like Marguerite Drouffe, she was arguably dis-oriented at the start of her career as she embarked on her linguistic and literary *errance*, had her path re-oriented, and that *Quand prime*'s rejection had direct consequences on her development as a fiction writer, in terms of her writing style, content, plot and structure, and narrative voice.

The repressed semiotic resurfaces repeatedly, in the guise of feminine-female characters, only to be rendered abject again and again in Beauvoir's fiction through death or murder, and finally again, madness, for much of the writer's career. The existentialist trilogy of *L'Invitée*, *Le Sang des autres* and *Tous les hommes sont mortels*, as well as her most successful novel, the

Goncourt-winning *Les Mandarins,* that were successfully offered for publication following *Quand prime'*s supposed failure, display a marked increase in the number of male characters, in their prominence and authority, as well as the extent to which the novels are focalised through their masculine perspective, and as we shall see in Chapter Two, the feminine universal is largely suppressed until it resurfaces centrally along with the female *je* and the madwoman in *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*.

-- Chapter Two --

The Return of Semiotic Madness in Simone de Beauvoir's Late Fiction: *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*

This chapter will focus on the two final works of fiction by Simone de Beauvoir, *Les Belles Images* (1966) and *La Femme rompue* (1967), in which the figure of the madwoman takes diegetic centre stage and takes control of the narrative with the first-person female voice. I will argue that in these two texts the semiotic potential of Beauvoir's writing begins to achieve greater expression than in the intervening period. The madwoman exposes an anxiety of female authorship which simultaneously reveals Beauvoir's anxieties about writing 'as a woman' (Jardine 1979, 233) and also reflects the belated confidence in her own womanhood that enables her to engage in this subversive act. Through the treatment of women's madness and the increasing madness and poeticism (in *La Femme rompue* in particular) of the language, Beauvoir's writing here come closest to the revolutionary semiotic force Kristeva identified with poetic language, which is also often aligned with the *écriture féminine* movement that Beauvoir consistently refused to acknowledge. Before considering these final texts, however, it is instructive to consider briefly the works of fiction between the first manuscript that I focus on in Chapter One and the two works I discuss here, or in other words, the four novels we might call normative in between the differing espousals of madness in *Quand prime le spirituel* and *Les Belles Images*.

Following the rejection of *Quand prime*, Beauvoir's first four published novels are markedly different in length, theme, style and narrative voice from the earlier manuscript. The range of narrative perspectives contracts from a multiplicity of women's voices to remove the female *Je* altogether and replace it with a predominance of male viewpoints and voices, often alternating with a (third-person) female viewpoint, but not a first-person female voice until *Les Mandarins* (1954). Elizabeth Fallaize remarks that after *Quand prime*, 'The story of the rest of Beauvoir's fiction is the story of an ever-increasing reduction of this plurality, and a loss of the authority conceded to the female voice' (1988, 175). In a manner similar to the writing of Linda Lê at certain points in her career, as I shall argue in Chapter Four, an anxiety of authorship and of the authority of the female voice appears to be surmounted by symbiosis

with the masculine. These novels can be described as masculinised texts displaying a hermaphroditism or symbiosis of narrative voice, being novels in which the narrative is shared between central male and female characters, and in which the central female voice depends in some irreducible way on union with a male *alter ego*.

The existentialist trilogy produced in relatively quick succession during the 1940s, *L'Invitée* (1943), *Le Sang des autres* (1945), and *Tous les hommes sont mortels* (1946), continues to present central female protagonists, but these women are now framed in relation to central male characters whose presence overshadows the women socially, culturally and in terms of linguistic powers and as authoritative bearers of truth. There is an increasingly marked oscillation or alternation of focalisation and narration, particularly following *L'Invitée*. In *L'Invitée*, the central characters Françoise and her lover Pierre share the story, with Xavière as a significant supporting character. Françoise is more centrally the focus of the third-person narration, and *style indirect libre* is used to make the reader privy to her thoughts in particular, even slipping almost imperceptibly into very rare, isolated interruptions of the first-person. However, as Martha Noel Evans points out, Françoise and Pierre 'operate as if they were fused into one', and it is a symbiotic couple where 'Françoise is living as a kind of parasite' (1986, 73) viv-à-vis the creative masculine, intellectually and emotionally, which undermines the 'female' aspect of the text. *Le Sang des autres* moves between the third-person narrative focalised through Hélène Bertrand and the first-person account of her lover Jean Blomart, who comes ultimately to dominate the text as he sits by Hélène's deathbed. *Tous les hommes sont mortels* opens with a third-person narration focused on several women, Régine, Florence and Annie, but soon moves into the first-person male narrative of the immortal Fosca, which subsumes the characters of the women, who appear again only very briefly. The feminine universal conceived in *Quand prime,* therefore, gradually recedes to concede the universal to the masculine. The narrative strategies employed and the dynamics of masculine authority versus feminine anxiety/loss of authority is chronicled exhaustively by Fallaize (1988) and need not be reproduced here. Moreover, as these masculinised texts do not feature the trope of the madwoman or female madness, they fall outside the scope of this study. There are, nonetheless, several relevant points to make.

Along with the increasing dominance of the central male characters, the first two novels of this trilogy propose the eradication of the feminine in the murder or death of central figures identified with the feminine. Fallaize traces how the plot of *L'Invitée* can be seen as presenting

the murder of a female character framed as feminine (Xavière) by a woman marked as a masculine intellectual (Françoise) (1988, Ch.2), a murder giving victory to the masculine intellectual figure (ibid, 36). I also find persuasive Evans' characterisation of this act as less a murder than a suicide, or rather the abjection of the feminine within, 'The most anguishing and criminal aspect of that murder is that it is a suicide' (Evans 1986, 86).[1] Evans convincingly reads the plot of *L'Invitée* as indicating that Beauvoir linked 'female authority and female authorship to the transgression of a taboo' (1986, 71), and says, 'Beauvoir's most fundamental conflicts about her right to exist, her right to be female are intimately linked with conflicts about another right: the right to write' (ibid., 72).[2] The text may be seen to perform the eradication or suppression of the feminine in order to allow the ascension of the necessarily-masculine, intellectual woman author. However, as Evans astutely points out, the putative murder is rather a 'murdering' as the crime is in stasis as the novel ends and this suspension is 'the *abyme* where Simone de Beauvoir and her writing come together' and in this void we can say that Beauvoir does not 'entirely kill off, or silence, her own femininity. She sets up rather a protective, negative logic of preserved ambiguity and permanently false resolution' (1986, 83).

Also highly revealing are the terms of Beauvoir's response to the publication of *L'Invitée*, her first published writing of any kind. She enthuses in *La Force de l'âge* (1960), 'l'essentiel, c'était que mon livre fût accepté: il paraîtrait au début de l'été prochain. J'en éprouvai, plutôt que de la joie, un immense soulagement' (FA 533) and this sense of relief expands to joy later when she reads a review, the most important aspect of which for Beauvoir was that the critic *had taken her seriously*:

> Il n'arrive pas souvent qu'on touche, sans équivoque, à l'accomplissement d'un long désir: cette chronique, rédigée par un vrai critique, imprimée dans un vrai journal, m'assurait, noir sur blanc, que j'avais composé un vrai livre, que j'étais vraiment, soudain, un écrivain. Je ne boudai pas ma joie. (FA 570-1)

[1] Evans also shows how Beauvoir saw fiction, including her own, as a feminine, sentimental genre inferior to the masculine lucidity and rationality of non-fiction (1986, 69). Evans further contends in *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in Twentieth-Century France* (1987) that Beauvoir saw her autobiography and essays as a hierarchically superior 'second writing' necessary to explain and justify the 'first writing' of the fiction (77).

[2] Fallaize similarly concludes that in *L'Invitée*, 'the desire of the strong female character to cling to the authority of the male word and to distance herself from the undesirable models of femininity remains strong' (1988, 42).

The sense of validation is uncontained. In order to regard herself as author of 'un vrai livre' after the failure of *Quand prime,* she appeared to require external – and inevitably masculine – approbation. Aside from the problematic need for Symbolic approval, this statement reinforces my argument at the end of Chapter One, underlining the role of the publishing industry, and confirming the imperative for what women write to be published and acknowledged on its own terms, in order for women's own stories to be inscribed within mainstream culture.

Following *Tous les hommes* Beauvoir turned seriously to essays, philosophy and to the feminist work that would immortalize her, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949). Six years after the publication of this ground-breaking study devoted to the analysis of the situation of women, Beauvoir returned to fiction with *Les Mandarins* (1954) and claimed the Prix Goncourt, perhaps the ultimate accolade for a French fiction writer. Beauvoir said of this lengthy narrative, 'Je voulais y mettre tout de moi' (FCI, 268), and the 'tout' that she conceives is one split between the characters of the writer Henri Perron, and Anne Dubreuilh through a dual narrative structure. Critics, and readers, have often been quick to identify Beauvoir with many of her female characters, unsurprisingly given the autobiographical content of much of her fiction. However, more recently, critics such as Susan Bainbrigge have begun to point out how Beauvoir also invested herself heavily in some of her central male characters, including the writer Henri Perron in *Les Mandarins* (Bainbrigge, in Holland & Renée 2005, Ch 4).

If, as Emma Wilson argues in relation to reading Proust, as readers we can 'cross-dress at will' to engage in gender-swapping (1996, 78), it must also be argued that writers may also cross-dress at will, and that in Beauvoir's autogenographic process of making and re-making herself as a writer, at this point it is the garb of a male writer she dons. Bainbrigge usefully reminds us that Beauvoir explained in *La Force des choses* (FCI, 360) her decision to make the writer in *Les Mandarins* male in order to make him 'universal' and not 'a special case' as it would have been were it a woman (2005, 98). Furthermore, Henri is imbued with the positive values of life and writing, while Anne represents the converse negatives of death and silence, 'elle me fournissait le négatif des objets qui se découvraient à travers Henri sous une figure positive' (FCI 360), although Bainbrigge demonstrates how the text ultimately exposes Henri's

self-doubt and 'inferiority complex' particularly in relation to his closest male literary peer, his friend Robert Dubreuilh (2005, 108).[3]

Beauvoir's longest novel, *Les Mandarins* has a meticulously balanced alternating narrative structure, shared between the 'Henri' third-person narrative chapters and the 'Anne' chapters narrated in the first person. The opening two chapters are split within themselves into parts allocated to these two differingly-gendered voices, so that the chapters are internally shared between what might be described as the male universal voice and the subjective female voice. Subsequent chapters are allocated wholly to one or other, with the final word given to Anne in the last, unusually short, chapter. It could be argued that in the tension between the masculine and the feminine, Beauvoir's *écriture* is at this point utterly split, or balanced, depending on how positively it is viewed.

Beauvoir's choice of name here, reproducing with 'Anne' the identity of the tragic heroine of her first manuscript *Quand prime*, cannot be ignored. With this move, Beauvoir now unites this identity with the first-person voice the character was robbed of in the earlier text, albeit still very limited here. It must also be noted that this second Anne is, from the very first lines of her discourse, marked by her identification with the silence of death, her horror of which opens and closes her narrative in the framing pair of her interior monologues. The crisis Anne experiences in *Les Mandarins* is lucid, rational and fundamentally 'sane', and although in the final chapter her mental state is bleak and suicidal, the scene is marked by a restrained tone of containment that in my view falls short of madness.[4] With the phial of poison that passes from Paule to Anne, which Anne first tidies away in her glove-box, then hunts out and grips tightly as she considers ingesting its contents to bring on her own death, only finally to return the phial to its dark recess in the glove-box, Beauvoir's text in this short closing chapter, almost concedes to the temptations of the semiotic, but yet again represses or refuses the semiotic madness that we see emergent in her final two works.[5] I do not read Anne as a figure of female madness, and as Paule is a secondary character and her madness is temporary, *Les*

[3] Genevieve Shepherd similarly comments on Henri's *'crise d'identité'* which she reads as mirroring Anne's self-doubt (2003, 162).

[4] Holland similarly concludes that Anne is not a madwoman as she 'does not "go mad"' (2009, 89). Holland does, nonetheless, argue that Anne's discourse and the language in the text, displaying excess, instability and transgression, 'is a discourse of madness' (113), but I find her analysis here less convincing than in relation to *La Femme rompue*, for example.

[5] The *vide* engulfing the first Anne in *Quand prime* now returns to threaten briefly her later double, who feels menaced by 'un abîme' (LMI 42); 'le vide' (43); and 'ce gouffre vertigineux' (LMI 60). It is the sound of voices that stops Anne committing suicide, and Fallaize concludes that 'the power of language again triumphs' (1988, 110).

Mandarins sits outside the remit of this thesis, although there is an argument for its inclusion in a larger study. Significant however, in the context of my analysis of the development of Beauvoir's *écriture*, is the combination in Anne of a central female protagonist who is (just about) not killed off by the text and who holds the first-person narrative, for the first time since Marguerite Drouffe in *Quand prime le spirituel*, and it is a combination that does not reappear for over a decade, until *Les Belles Images*, to which I now turn.

The Beautiful Broken Image of *Les Belles Images*

Beauvoir turned away from writing fiction after *Les Mandarins*, returning to essays and autobiography, and did not publish fiction for another twelve years. In an interview in 1965 she states, 'Si j'écris un autre roman, il est bien certain qu'il ne sera pas du même genre' (Jeanson 1966, 295). Although she then goes on to discuss technique, the content of her fiction from this point on also reflects a significant change. Holland argues that, 'In spite of attempts to silence, confine, and ignore madness, madness finds a voice in her writing. In spite of repression, it forces its way into the text. Beauvoir's text gets away. It gets messy' (2009, 21). This messy madness returns with the female *Je* that resumes the narrative voice, partially in the novel *Les Belles Images* (1966) and entirely in the short story cycle, *La Femme rompue* (1967). Consistently two of Beauvoir's most widely read texts (Fullbrook 1998, 136), they focus on a number of women experiencing crises in their relationships with the men around them, including fathers, husbands and sons, and a concomitant disillusionment with language or previously-accepted cultural truths, and a personal descent into, or narrow escape from, mental collapse. Beauvoir's writing here comes full circle to return to the feminocentrism of *Quand prime le spirituel* in terms of first-person narrative voice and focalisation, and in terms of the centrality and dominance of female character, the focus on those characters' crises, and the removal of the focus on (and focalisation through) male characters. Both also constitute a return to the shorter narrative form of the debut manuscript, and *La Femme rompue*, furthermore, returns to the non-linear structure of the short story cycle used in *Quand prime* and unseen in the corpus in the interim. Both later texts also return to the central logic of the plots of the *Quand prime nouvelles*, as each narrates the attempts by women to free themselves in some way from patriarchy, and from a dominating masculine influence that is predominantly linked to language.

Fallaize questions 'why this [mad] woman and her narrative forms are increasingly allowed to take the stage' (1988, 181). I argue here that as Beauvoir's *confidence* grew, in herself as a woman, in her relationships with other women through her feminist activism, and in her own identity as an intellectual in her own right (which by the late-1960s was in no doubt), she felt more able to let go of her identification with a masculine tradition and explore this female, feminine side of her self and her writing. The madwoman may, paradoxically, reveal a growing confidence in Beauvoir, an anxious audacity, to write as a woman, to resist the *logos* and experiment with a more female and feminine language, albeit still subtended by ambivalence. This experimentation with re-feminisation produces and reveals an anxiety about the deconstruction (or breakdown) of the masculinised authorial self necessarily involved. Although she had a formidable reputation to uphold, which I will come back to discuss later, Beauvoir had almost nothing left to prove intellectually.

Fallaize partly answers her own question by speculating that the years spent writing autobiography may have had a significant impact on Beauvoir: 'Writing about her life in this direct way [...] forced her (or permitted her?) to write as a woman' (1988, 181). Certainly Beauvoir concedes during the 1966 lecture in Japan that, 'ce «je», lorsque je le prononce, c'est aussi le «je» d'une femme' and she adds, 'je pense qu'il est intéressant de voir une vie de femme; le «je» que j'utilise est un «je» qui a une portée générale, il concerne un très grand nombre de femmes' (Francis and Gontier 1979, 450), and this confidence to assert a woman writer informing a *feminine* universal contrasts strongly with her perception that the 'universal' had to be male in *Les Mandarins*. While the autobiography presents a more objective, closed and Symbolic *je*, with Beauvoir meticulously constructing a literary persona for herself, her fiction offers the temptation of a far more open, deconstructed and semiotic *je*, which in dismantling earlier solidity also threatens to deconstruct the figure of the woman writer Beauvoir has constructed in her autobiography, this Théagène-Beauvoir of *Mémoires*.

There is also the crucial factor of context – historical and personal – or in Beauvoirean terms, the 'situation', which for the author had now changed unrecognisably. *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* teeter historically and linguistically on the threshold of the radical revolution in feminism and women's writing that came to be known as *écriture*

féminine.[6] Seventeen years after *Le Deuxième Sexe*, by 1966 Beauvoir's life had changed considerably, largely as a result of the enormous success of that now-iconic text. Her daily and political life now involved contact with many more women, 'for most feminists, working and talking with other women in the movement led to a new appreciation of "feminine culture"' (Holmes 1996, 208), and while this is written of the era after 1968, it may also be said of Beauvoir in the period leading up to the late-1960s. She experienced a female milieu which would later see her join a feminist collective that published, from late-1973, the 'Sexisme ordinaire' column in *Les Temps modernes*, of which she was an editor (ibid., 201). During the 1960s and '70s Beauvoir was centrally involved not just in feminist causes, but in *women's* causes, including the Djamila Boupacha torture case, the Rochel factory case and the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes' pro-abortion campaign.[7] She became President of the pro-choice group *Choisir* in 1972, and two years later President of the League for Women's Rights.[8] She was also receiving a daily flow of personal letters from women who had read *Le Deuxième Sexe* in particular, and wanted to share their stories with her. And of course on the more intimate front there were her intense friendships, both sexual and non-sexual, with women such as Sylvie Le Bon, who Beauvoir finally legally adopted. There was also during the 1950s and '60s a climate of changing attitudes towards the novel's form and style with the *Nouveau Roman* and the *Tel Quel* group, which arguably lent a certain literary legitimacy to experimental fiction across the board.[9]

Produced during this period of social, literary and personal transition, *Les Belles Images* presents three generations of women undergoing varying degrees of mental disorder or crisis. Focalised through the character Laurence and her trajectory towards anorexic breakdown, we witness also the devastation of Laurence's mother Dominique, who is abandoned by her companion Gilbert, and also the early signs of anxiety in Laurence's daughter Catherine. The latter's youthful questioning of received wisdoms and her resulting perturbation are pathologised by her father, Laurence's husband Jean-Charles, and he sends Catherine to a psychiatrist who declares the young girl to be 'légèrement désaxée' (BI 174). These three

[6] Holmes (1996, Chapter 10) describes the rapid appearance of the range of new feminisms after May 1968 and the subtleties of the differences between them. Marks and Courtivron, *New French Feminisms* (1981) offer examples of this feminist writing.

[7] See Bair (1990) or Moi (1994) for fuller details.

[8] This culminated in her belated public assumption of the title 'feminist' in her interview with Alice Schwarzer, first published as 'La Femme révoltée' in *Le Nouvel Observateur* , 14th February 1972; 47-54.

[9] Fallaize offers an interesting discussion of the contradictory relationship between Beauvoir (and Sartre) and these movements and their proponents, notably Nathalie Sarraute (1988, 118-9).

generations of women establish a structure of female linguistic inheritance (however much it is in crisis) in the sense evoked by Virginia Woolf's famous discussion of the need for women to think back through their mothers in order to create a landscape of literary mothers for women writers – which links back to the Bloomian concept of literary fathers and the anxiety of influence. If we have literary mothers and a sense of female linguistic lineage, perhaps the need for the madwoman, or the sacrifice of the feminine, becomes diminished. This sense of feminine linguistic transmission also exists at the end of *La Femme rompue,* and both texts offer a sense of optimism in relation to this thinking forward through the daughters, to paraphrase Woolf.

Both Laurence and her mother Dominique are economically independent women combining successful careers with motherhood, but this does not protect them from the threat of mental crisis or from the threat of submission to patriarchal authority. Laurence is constantly conflicted by the split involved in juggling her personal and professional roles, she has recovered from a depressive period five years earlier, and as the reader encounters her on the opening pages she appears menaced by crisis. This conflict, this split between the personal and professional/social, is reflected in Laurence's bifurcating narrative, which slips almost imperceptibly back and forth between the *je* and the *elle* of narration, at times even within the same phrase, for example, 'Elle s'est beaucoup dépensée, c'est pour ça que maintenant elle se sent déprimée, je suis cyclique' (BI 8). The male-female narrative split of the previous clutch of Beauvoir's novels shifts here to a duality within one individual female, and the narration is disrupted and unsettled within itself. The voices divide between the subject(ive) who is going mad, contrasted with a more objective Symbolic voice, the social gaze or superego, which in turn becomes increasingly subject to commentary by the subjective perspective in what Sarah Fishwick perceptively describes as 'a power struggle' (1999, 473-4).

Laurence's *je* is unstable, erratic, 'hesitant, querying, often enclosed in parentheses' and conveys 'largely a growing sense of panic' (Fallaize 1988, 122; 124), and expresses Laurence's increasing questioning regarding the *belles images* of her milieu. In particular, this first-person voice is articulated in revolt against the Symbolic (Fishwick 480), but time and again becomes muffled, muted or is overpowered by the more external narrating voice. Beauvoir said of *Les Belles Images* that, where in her earlier novels each character's point of view was perfectly clear and the book's meaning arose from the oppositions of these, 'Dans celui-ci, il s'agissait

de faire parler le silence. Le problème était neuf pour moi' (TCF 172).[10] To achieve this level of ambiguity Beauvoir employs a highly experimental and complex narrative technique combining for example third-person and first-person voice; direct tagged thought and speech; and direct and indirect free thought – all derived from or in relation to the consciousness of one woman, Laurence.[11] It is from the interstices between these fractured perspectives of the same woman that the semiotic madness of this text speaks.[12]

The first-person female voice here, therefore, is split and wavering, and in conflict with itself, in a fictional personification of the most fundamental conflict Beauvoir describes in one of the most important and famous passages of *Le Deuxième Sexe,* in which woman is torn between her attempt to assert herself (in language) as subject and the demands of a situation (patriarchy) 'qui la constitue comme inessentielle' (DSI 1949, 31) and object. We can see this power struggle playing out in this *je/elle* split in *Les Belles Images* between a female, feminine specificity in language and a more universal (and therefore inherently masculine) language. Fishwick's close analysis of the implicit feminist politics of the *je/elle* duality reveals that Laurence's *je* tends to interrupt the external narration 'in association with certain key themes which foreground Laurence's female-gendered status. These are: sexual desire, motherhood and her experiences of being a daughter' (1999, 476), and she concludes that this battle for authority, for self-authorship, 'illustrates the precariousness of feminine linguistic subjectivity' resulting in 'the constant resurfacing, and overpowering' of Laurence's female, subjective, first-person voice (ibid.). Within this dynamic we witness the operation of an anxiety of female (and feminine) authorship in *Les Belles Images*.

The split narrative, this inner conflict within Laurence, also reflects her alienation by and from language, and her growing realisation of this alienation. Laurence undergoes a journey moving from the comforting reassurance of platitudes, the 'belles images' of the title, in her bourgeois milieu where in the opening idyllic scene '[t]out a été parfait' (BI 8), towards an ever-increasing questioning of the certainties of her consumerist western French culture, and also of the false image of woman she (and her mother) have been made into. Laurence's role in this culture, as a copy-writer for an advertising agency, is to produce language that sells

[10] Beauvoir also describes the second and third stories of *La Femme rompue* as being similarly articulated through silences (TCF 177).
[11] Fishwick elaborates fully on these techniques and their use in the novel (1999, 472-3).
[12] Holland (2009) also argues that the unsettling of meaning and exploitation of silences in *Les Belles Images* can be related to Kristeva's semiotic, and that madness 'is an effect of the text as a whole' (115).

these 'belles images', where she is therefore in control of Symbolic language, and complicit in her own alienation, something she begins to realise with an increasing sense of lucid panic. The narration oscillates along with Laurence's attitude between *complicité* and *malaise*, between conformity and revolt, as she recognises that she is like an advertising Midas – 'Tout ce qu'elle touche se change en image' (BI 21) – and the extent to which this extends to her self, 'maintenant elle est victime des slogans qu'elle a fabriqués' (BI 138).[13]

These alternative states of lucidity and complicity relate to the tension between Laurence's questioning madness (a state of lucid revolt) and the theme of mendacity (complicity). Mendacity recurs with references to *miroirs* and *mensonges* throughout, and pointedly relates to the two older 'formed' women, Laurence and her mother Dominique. As with *Quand prime*, mirrors and reflections or images of the central female characters are dominant motifs in *Les Belles Images*, in which the photographic image reinforces the notion of the self as image. However, where in the earlier text these images were sources of reassurance and confidence, however ephemeral or superficial, the self-image in *Les Belles Images* is exposed as alienating and mockingly false, and becomes itself the source of anxiety and crisis. The reassuring image is revealed to be a lie, a lure.

This imagistic falsity is replicated in the illusions created by language, and the novel's language recreates the sense of fracture. As Holland points out in relation to the use of repetition, 'Utterances reverberate throughout the narrative like mirror images, *en abyme,* reflections of reflections of reflections' (2009, 133). The text's external narrating voice tells us that 'Laurence a toujours été une image. Dominique y a veillé, fascinée dans son enfance par des images si différentes de sa vie, tout entière butée [...] à combler ce fossé ' (BI 21), and her mother Dominique's role in making her daughter into this fairytale female, 'Petite fille impeccable, adolescente accomplie, parfaite jeune fille' (22), in order to cover the cracks within herself, is foregrounded. Dominique, constantly seeking validation in the specular image, proffers an illusory mask of smooth perfection that is always alien, 'Dominique imite toujours quelqu'un' (BI 34), but ultimately as we shall see, 'her flawless surface is unmasked by Beauvoir as a fragile veneer' (Shepherd 2003, 199). While Dominique clings fearfully to her fakery, for Laurence it becomes increasingly intolerable, and as Shepherd notes, 'Far from

[13] Fishwick (1999) suggests that the first-person voice can be read as evidence of Laurence's resistance to the order which has moulded her, but fails to consider the element of Laurence's complicity, which is a very important point recognised by Shepherd (2003).

jubilantly assuming the specular image in the mirror or in the adoring eyes of her lover and husband, Laurence instead sees it as false and alienating' (2003, 210: see for example BI 108).

The reversal of the motif of mirrors and self-image between *Quand prime* and *Les Belles Images* helps us to situate the psychological processes in this latter text within the context of Beauvoir's corpus and the evolution of her literary voice. In the absence of a role model of woman writer that she felt she could identify with, Beauvoir in *Quand prime* uses writing as a mirror to write herself an image to identify with (in particular Marguerite Drouffe), thus autogenographically using language to (re)produce her writerly self. Being at its core an image hiding profound ambivalences, and then further problematised by the manuscript's so-called failure, this model is overwritten by the subsequent fictions, which I describe as masculinised or hermaphrodite. *Les Belles Images* then returns to rediscover this model, this figure of the woman writer, but the text compulsively exposes the extent to which the woman (copy)writer is herself complicit in producing self-alienating images, and how deeply alienated she is by Symbolic language, including her own Symbolic image of herself.[14] Laurence experiences moments of resistance and the potential for revolt, as she repeatedly, but always temporarily, exposes and rejects this haloed, false image just as she removes the shiny necklace given by her husband Jean-Charles, 'Elle ôte le bijou avec une espèce de rage: comme si elle se délivrait d'un mensonge' (BI 140), only to adorn herself with it once more soon after, which appears to confirm her complicity and refusal adequately to resist her own downfall.

Laurence experiences relief from this self-alienation in moments highlighting her *female* specificity, in the maternal and the sexual in particular, moments where the *je* voice is in ascendence (Fishwick 1999, 476), and we recall that Kristeva's semiotic is aligned with the maternal, and corporeal. Desire and the sexual encounter enable Laurence to transcend her alienated state and connect with her corporeality. She recalls an erotic moment early in her relationship with her husband, 'Soudain, un soir, au retour d'une promenade, dans la voiture arrêtée, sa bouche sur ma bouche, cet embrasement, ce vertige. Alors, pendant des jours et des semaines, je n'ai plus été une image, mais chair et sang, désir, plaisir' (BI 22), and 'embrasement' here evokes both the verb *embrasser* and denotes the vivifying heat of sensuality. This sensual intensity of physical experience returns in her affair with her lover,

[14] Luce Irigaray's *Speculum, de l'autre femme* (1974) argues that the mirror of language in which women 'see' themselves serves to constitute an alienated, alienating Symbolic subjectivity. Beauvoir's own aphorism, 'On ne naît pas femme, on le devient' (DSII, 13) fundamentally expresses the same idea.

'avec Lucien; le feu dans mes veines, et dans mes os cette exquise déliquescence' (ibid.). However, Laurence later breaks with Lucien, mainly because their sex-life has become mundanely routine, and her sexuality appears in the end to be moribund. This treatment of the sexual mutedly recalls, but does not recreate, the uncorseted eroticism of *Quand prime*'s Lisa and Marcelle, though arguably the repression effected here does reproduce the treatment of sexuality in the earlier text, moving from expression to suppression.

Perhaps the most unique vector of female specificity, the maternal, is a force both driving revolt and acting as a constraint thereto in *Les Belles Images*. The maternal bifurcates as Laurence is caught between two opposing modes of maternity. She is divided in her status as both a daughter and a mother, and also between her negative linguistic inheritance from her mother (who passes on only lies) and her positive ambitions for the legacy she will pass on to her own daughter, Catherine. It is Laurence's close, protective identification with her daughter, and Catherine's potential to subvert the established order (with her questioning and with her unorthodox friend Brigitte) that spurs Laurence in turn to begin resisting this order. In a moment of angry confrontation with her husband Jean-Charles, Laurence rages at his attempts to patronise and infantilize her and Catherine, 'Si sûr de son bon droit; furieux si nous dérangeons l'image qu'il se fait de nous, petite fille, jeune femme exemplaires, se foutant de ce que nous sommes pour de bon' (BI 133). The triple-repetition of the first-person plural pronoun *nous* and the zeugma effected between 'exemplaires' and the two ages of woman, 'fille' and 'femme' stress the identification between the two female characters. Catherine embodies the semiotic threat to Symbolic hegemony, and Laurence's desire to protect a linguistic space for her daughter's potential to be realised is a potent metaphor for the sexual/textual politics of Beauvoir's *écriture* at this point. Laurence determines that, 'on ne m'obligera pas à élever Catherine de la même façon. Elle dit avec force: - Je n'empêcherai pas Catherine de lire les livres qui lui plaisent ni de voir les camarades qu'elle aime' (BI 132).

Irigaray articulates the notion of the mother/daughter dyad as a site of resistance to the patriarchal order, 'La relation mère/fille, fille/mère constitue un noyeau extrêmement explosif dans nos sociétés. La penser, la changer, revient à ébranler l'ordre patriarchal' (1981, 86).[15] Fishwick places great emphasis on the mother/daughter axis, and persuasively follows Irigaray

[15] Where in *Quand prime* the mother/daughter relationship, e.g. between Mme Vignon and Anne, is destructive and the maternal abject, the maternal in *Les Belles Images* has a radical, positive and liberating aspect in so far as it relates to the future.

to conclude that this dyad formed by Laurence and Catherine in *Les Belles Images* constitutes 'a site of potential resistance to women's exclusion from language' (1999, 480). Laurence, though, realises that her own language is mendacious and that she is in danger of selling Catherine the same lies she has swallowed. With Jean-Charles, she buys her daughter a camera, another machine to produce fixed, false images, 'Catherine sera contente. Mais c'est autre chose que je voudrais lui donner: la sécurité, la gaieté, le plaisir d'être au monde. C'est tout ça que je prétends vendre quand je lance un produit. Mensonge' (BI 139). Laurence is linguistically impotent, unable to convey security and the pleasure of being to her daughter, because there is no language of feminine exchange for them to share, 'il nous manque un langage commun [...] Je n'arrive pas à trouver le contact' (BI 77).[16]

What prevents this language of feminine exchange, apart from the patriarchal Symbolic, what blocks Laurence's revolt (or prevents revolt becoming revolution), is the dark side of the maternal, which Fishwick does not adequately consider in her optimistic Irigarayan reading. Laurence is from the start distant from her mother, 'je n'ai jamais pris le parti de maman' (BI 15). The threatening semiotic *pouvoir* of the maternal is embodied in Dominique's ruined figure following her abandonment by Gilbert. Here the mother/daughter dyad is in conflict. Dominique is undone, and her smooth shiny image shattered. Devastated by the violence of Gilbert's departure (both in being abandoned and when he hits her), the Symbolic culture she has been constructed and seduced by leaves Dominique utterly abject in the terms of Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980).[17] Kristeva writes, 'l'abject, objet chu, est radicalement un exclu et me tire vers là où le sens s'effondre' (1980, 9) and '[à] la lisière de l'inexistence et de l'hallucination, d'une réalité qui, si je la reconnais, m'annihile. L'abject et l'abjection sont là mes garde-fous. Amorces de ma culture' (ibid., 10). Dominique moves from desired object of her culture, through her ageing, sexual obsolescence, to abject *déchet*. She later fearfully asserts that 'une femme sans homme, socialement c'est une *déclassée'* (BI 178; my emphasis), and the term speaks of social non-entity, as the text reveals the terror of a woman contemplating Symbolic non-existence following separation from the masculine. This terror is shared by Laurence. The habitually immaculate Dominique, now dishevelled, founders in her

[16] See Fishwick (1999, 478; 481).

[17] Kristeva posits the abject, inherently linked to the maternal, as that which is excluded from phallocentric language or sacrificed in order to instantiate Symbolic language, yet which always subversively threatens meaning with its collapse. She argues for a literature that acknowledges the abject to incorporate it within language as that which is unknown/unknowable, and claims that avant-garde literature does this.

darkened bedroom where the curtains, opened so optimistically by Marcelle in *Quand prime,* are now closed; a vase of flowers and water, topoi strongly metonymic of the feminine, are scattered and spilled, and Dominique's voice is strangled by sobs as all she sees left is to die (BI 124).[18]

The scene of her mother's abject shattering confronts Laurence with semiotic excess and madness, and her reaction combines fear and fascination. She is horrified by Gilbert's violence, but more immediately, by the maternal abject in front of her:

> Laurence a la tête en feu. Dans le désordre du lit défait, du peignoir déchiré, des fleurs renversées [...] L'horreur prend Laurence à la gorge, l'horreur de ce qui s'est passé en Dominique pendant ces quelques instants, de ce qui se passe en ce moment. Ah! toutes les images ont volé en éclats, et il ne sera jamais possible de les raccommoder. Laurence voudrait prendre un tranquillisant elle aussi, mais non, elle a besoin de toute sa lucidité. (BI 124)

There is an ambiguity to the lucidity here, as Laurence 'sees' clearly through the shattering images which would be consistent with her growing sense of lucid madness, but her clarity here is a resistance to disorder and madness. The scene is intolerable for Laurence who hurries to recompose her mother and tidy her up. If *Quand prime* constructs the figure of the woman writer in language, *Les Belles Images* deconstructs her, or at least imagines her deconstruction with these images scattered and shattered along with Dominique (and in Laurence's anorexia), and this un-making or breaking down exposes semiotic madness in the process.

Significantly, Laurence's first episode of vomiting is triggered by Dominique's rage expressed *linguistically* in the letter the latter writes to Gilbert's new, young fiancée, as when Laurence learns it has been sent 'un spasme lui déchire l'estomac, elle vomit tout le thé qu'elle vient d'absorber[...] l'estomac vide, des spasmes le tordent encore [...] elle a peur. Une peur panique' (BI 121). This panicked fear, recurring at the end of *La Femme rompue* and ubiquitous in the writing of Emma Santos, appears as an almost inevitable corollary of resistance to Symbolic language. It can be seen as both self-preserving and self-limiting, and it

[18] Flowers are a frequent metonym of the feminine in Beauvoir's writing. In the opening pages of *Les Belles Images* Laurence is seen gripping 'les dahlias magnifiques' of many colours in her hand (BI 14).

is a key element holding Laurence back from a more emphatic rejection of Symbolic language, from a revolution in poetic language. The *vide* engulfed by, and covered over by, language in *Quand prime* resurfaces here as the text exposes the inadequacy of language and the insufficiency of the beautiful fantasies it produces.[19] With her anorexia Laurence experiences the semiotic potential, the terrifying void, at her own core, 'ce creux, ce vide, qui glace le sang, qui est pire que la mort' (BI 85), and the act of regurgitation itself offers relief, 'Quel soulagement! Elle voudrait se vider plus entièrement encore, se vomir tout entière' (BI 169).

Before analysing in detail the symbolism of Laurence's anorexic crisis, it is worth considering the other parent, Laurence's father. Her questioning journey crystallizes in a decisive trip to the Greek roots of occidental patriarchal culture, the cradle of the western Symbolic, which Laurence takes with her adored father – and the parallel between the personal, linguistic paternal and the origins of cultural patriarchy is none too subtle. 'Papa' is an avid reader and a figure associated with historic, cultural and literary truths, which Laurence has adopted as her own; her access to language has come through him, and she recognises that 'le sens des mots et des choses me vînt par lui' (BI 154). Visiting the ancient sites of Mycenae and the Parthenon, Laurence has her illusions about her father shattered and realises he is not the perfect sage she had imagined, and she is forced to renounce 'her learned dependency on patriarchal wisdom' (Fallaize 1988, 136). She is bored by the dry, dead monuments that enthral him, and she is more interested in the living people around her and the politics of their impoverished living conditions, which her father romanticises away. Laurence sees that the beautiful lie by which she has been duped perhaps most completely is the *belle image* of her father's truth and knowledge:

> Ce n'était donc pas vrai qu'il possédait la sagesse et la joie et que son propre rayonnement lui suffisait! Ce secret qu'elle se reprochait de n'avoir pas su découvrir, peut-être qu'après tout il n'existait pas. Il n'existait pas: elle le sait depuis la Grèce. J'ai été *déçue*. Le mot la poignarde. Elle serre son mouchoir contre ses dents comme pour arrêter le cri qu'elle est incapable de pousser. Je suis déçue. J'ai raison de l'être. (BI 179-80; original italics)[20]

[19] Holland (2009) and Shepherd (2003) also draw this conclusion, remarking that the inadequacy of language is a metacommentary here.
[20] Interestingly, Catherine is not held in thrall by her father (BI 171).

This *cri* of semiotic rage that Beauvoir's text cannot adequately express is articulated in the poetic madness of Emma Santos' *écriture*, described by Beauvoir herself as 'un cri écrit' (Santos 1977, 48) as we shall see in Chapter Three. Laurence returns from Greece depressed and takes to her bed, where she languishes in the dark, unable to keep food down in a metaphor of her inability to continue to swallow the lies she has been fed all her life.

Having detached herself from her father, from the Symbolic truths she had adopted as her own, and with her mother abject and distanced, Laurence can be seen to be psychologically and linguistically orphaned. On her sick-bed she sees herself as she returned from Greece, in a linguistic no-man's land between lies she refuses to repeat and a truth she no longer believes in, 'Elle ne mentait pas, elle ne disait pas la vérité. Tous ces mots qu'on dit! Des mots...' and later, 'Je n'étais pas une image; mais pas autre chose non plus: rien [...] Seule Catherine...' (BI 170). Laurence is left trapped within a glittering cage, the gilded bars and hollow emptiness of which she can see, but cannot escape. The elliptical openness of the phrase '[s]eule Catherine...' points to the utopian future-orientation of the revolt, and the madness, in this text. Laurence's anorexic breakdown and recovery define the limitations of the revolt in *Les Belles Images*, driven by the potential gestured at in the ellipsis of this hopeful aspiration for the filial, yet held back by the horrified fear produced by the encounter with the abject, semiotic maternal.

In a culturally feminine-coded form of expressing revolt, in the anorexia that has become increasingly prevalent among young women in our current culture, Laurence rejects violently, physically, the false woman society has made of her, shouting repeatedly 'Non! Non!' (BI 180). She refuses to see a doctor, knowing a cure will necessarily require conforming to the normative image from which she knows she is so deeply alienated, 'ils lui feront tout avaler; tout quoi? tout ce qu'elle vomit, sa vie, celles des autres avec leurs fausses amours [...] leurs mensonges' (BI 180). The self-authored model of the woman writer produces alienation so severe it must be ejected, and Laurence vomits up herself, abjecting the woman within, but also her entire being, 'Elle voudrait [...] se vomir tout entière' (BI 169). We might ask which woman is being disgorged here, the false woman created by language or the authentic, bodily woman? The answer appears to be evident, that Laurence rejects the Symbolically-constructed image of woman she has had to swallow all her life. However, if we recall the first episode of vomiting being triggered by Dominique's mad letter, it can be argued that it is *also* the void, 'ce creux, ce vide' (BI 85), the terrifying potential of the semiotic, that Laurence

attempts to expel as she retches for three days in dark isolation. In the throes of the psychic conflict between Symbolic and semiotic forces raging within her, she temporarily rejects both.

The ambivalence of the text is reflected in its language and style. There is a contrast between the *belles images* and clichéd slogans of ossified language on the one hand and on the other, a 'galopade d'images et de mots' (BI 179), a semiotic excess of visual and verbal chaos, that is nonetheless constantly reined in by Symbolic hesitation. The opening scene's ambiguity, enumeration, hyperbolic description and chromatic insistence make it very visual and imagistic. The Christmas shopping scene, similarly, is 'disturbingly manic' (Shepherd 2003, 204) and the enumeration of coloured glass, windows, bottles, crystal, gemstones and jewels produces a semiotic excess of colour and language. Holland's painstaking study of the language in *Les Belles Images* unsettles the common view of Beauvoir's writing as flat, closed or lacking in complexity and demonstrates unequivocally the richness of the writing here (2009). Holland helpfully analyses the use of enumeration, repetition, irony, ellipsis, parenthesis, punctuation, fragmentation, as well as disordered, 'transgressive', 'disarticulated' and 'spasmodic' syntax (2009, 154), and the juxtaposition and equivalence of opposites to argue that 'the text is, in a sense, crazy' and constantly disrupts and undermines meaning (2009, 123). She concludes persuasively that the effect of repetition and enumeration is to generate the rhythms of the Kristevan *chora* and semiotic energy. There is a strong sense of transgressive semiotic force in this text, which produces a post-modern novel full of ambiguity and (meticulously constructed) disorder. However, I would underline Holland's own hesitation in the phrase, 'in a sense' above, as there is also a sense in which this text is fundamentally clear and literal, or sane, if you will, and it cannot in my view properly be called *poetic* or lyrical (although there are lyrical moments). For Kristeva the poetic is the result of a specific relation that might be described as harmonious between the semiotic and the Symbolic, where the Symbolic embraces or harnesses the semiotic, and we might think of Lisa's masturbation scene in *Quand prime* as an example. In *Les Belles Images* these linguistic dispositions are in tension, in conflict, and what is produced is a jarring, rather than a lyrical, fragmentation that scatters language like the dishevelled flowers and water in Dominique's room, rather than making it sing. The semiotic is forcing its way into the Symbolic, uninvited.

Laurence's recovery is a re-covering of the semiotic with Symbolic language. Rather than be cured she cures herself, or more precisely, she contains her (semiotic) madness in order to function within (Symbolic) language. In the moment of *dénouement* Laurence both concedes

defeat and declares victory simultaneously. She is convinced that for her it is too late, 'j'ai été eue' (181), she is formed and feels she cannot unmake what has been made of her in order to remake herself, but she determines to save her daughter from a similar fate to her own, from ignorance and indifference:

> Non. Pourquoi non? Cette taupe qui ouvre les yeux et voit qu'il fait noir, à quoi ça l'avance-t-il? Refermer les yeux. Et Catherine? lui clouer les paupières? 'Non': elle a crié tout haut. Pas Catherine. Je ne permettrai pas qu'on lui fasse ce qu'on m'a fait. Qu'a-t-on fait de moi? Cette femme qui n'aime personne, insensible aux beautés du monde, incapable même de pleurer, cette femme que je vomis. Catherine: au contraire lui ouvrir les yeux tout de suite et peut-être un rayon de lumière filtrera jusqu'à elle, peut-être elle s'en sortira... De quoi? De cette nuit. De l'ignorance, de l'indifférence. Catherine... Elle se redresse soudain.
>
> - On ne lui fera pas ce qu'on m'a fait. (BI 180-181)

We notice again the ellipsis following Catherine's name, injecting a sense of possibility. The determination to protect this possibility is what drives Laurence's recovery and emboldens her to confront her husband, who is 'si autoritaire, si sûr d'avoir raison' (BI 181). Realizing that 'si je tiens bon, je gagne' (182), Laurence refuses her husband's authority over Catherine, asserting her own right and role in overseeing her daughter's education. Laurence asserts a law of the mother, reminding Jean-Charles that while he intervenes intermittently, it is she who takes daily charge of Catherine's education, and as such she has authority, the right to write her daughter's future. Laurence's resisting stance is driven by, and therefore enabled by, the fact that she embraces the maternal. Not the ideal of Symbolic motherhood presented by Dominique, so gilded yet so easily fractured. Laurence embraces the maternal within herself and it could be argued that this assumption of positive maternity, which drives the narrative from the earliest pages, speaks of a certain semiotic acceptance in Beauvoir's *écriture*.

A highly future-oriented text throughout, the narrative closes with an uncertain but hopeful forward gaze, reverting to the third-person voice, 'Pour moi les jeux sont faits, pense-t-elle en regardant son image – un peu pâle, les traits tirés. Mais les enfants auront leur chance. Quelle chance? elle ne le sait même pas' (BI 183). Although Laurence is trapped, there is hope for the daughter, for the future generation of women, who will have their chance (one she cannot foresee), because the mother has stood up for them and resisted the authority of

the masculine Symbolic, although she herself has not transcended or escaped it, and Laurence does not leave her husband, despite contemplating doing so. Jean-Charles initially cannot understand what Laurence is saying, because for perhaps the first time, as Laurence affirms, she is saying clearly and directly what she thinks, not what he thinks or what she thinks she is supposed to think. This resistance is possible because of the potentially liberating crisis Laurence has undergone, and although incomplete here, the potential is recognised, and madness or *folie* 'becomes a symbol of the struggle of the individual for expression' (Fallaize 1988, 134).

The ambiguity of the ending is indicative of the ambivalence of the linguistic disposition within the text. Laurence, both tempted and threatened by semiotic collapse, re-emerges into Symbolic language just as she re-adorns herself with the jewelled necklace. Pointing out that the *je* is finally 'overpowered by the external narrating voice' Fishwick sees Laurence 'losing' in the struggle to fully accede to the subject-position in language (1999, 481). Shepherd, by contrast, argues convincingly that Laurence's use of language has changed, and while she may be 'imprisoned in the Symbolic' (2003, 213) and language appears to win, nonetheless, 'this is a script written by Laurence herself' (ibid., 217). Importantly, what Laurence does, having recognised the operation of language and the socio-cultural Symbolic as a system or a structure, is to resist that structure from within. She uses thetic clarity with language 'crystalline' in its 'calm lucidity' (Shepherd 2003, 217) to protect a linguistic space in which her daughter's subversive questioning may develop. There is a strong sense of empowerment and authority to the use of language here, and Laurence is no longer a ventriloquist parroting others' clichés but employing words to assert and impose her ideas and agency, and we may conclude that Laurence 'to some extent redefines the Symbolic order' (Shepherd 2003, 199). For Holland too the ending is largely positive, concluding that Laurence has been unable to master language until now, and at 'the end of the book Laurence finds her voice. Language is her weapon that she will use to silence others' (2009, 121), although I agree with her qualification that the stand taken is 'limited' (ibid., 122). Laurence, therefore, partially transcends her crisis and madness, and she both is and is not changed as a result, and the liberation offered in the crisis is deferred to the next generation.

The madness of *Les Belles Images* can be read as signalling an attitude of revolt that operates to prepare the ground or to create a linguistic space for the daughter's revolution, but stops short of engaging in revolution itself. Such a revolution, a desire to overthrow the

pre-existing structure in order to replace it with a new structure, takes place in the writing of Emma Santos, as we shall see in Chapter Three. What *Les Belles Images* recognises is the possibility for change within a particular system or structure, which itself is an important counter-argument to the problem of the double bind, the question that is often raised in relation to feminism and the attempt to effect change in language through that very language. Fredric Jameson points out in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), in his rethinking of Althusserian Marxism, that the 'structure' of any system is an absent cause, 'since it is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not a part of the whole or one of the levels, but rather the entire system of *relationships* among those levels' (36; original italics). This highlights the extent to which any system is constituted by the different, distinct elements within it, and formed by the relationships between those elements, and is never immutable. If those relationships change, the system itself, the entire structure, changes accordingly. *Les Belles Images* exposes how the Symbolic system of language is predicated on relationships in a dynamic of power and authority (Foucault's discourse), and how one element – here Laurence's different, authoritative, use of language – may reorder the power dynamic of its relationships within the system and in the process change the structure itself. Language may be used to resist and change language, without necessarily requiring revolution.

This penultimate work of fiction has been described as a very self-conscious work and 'a major departure from Beauvoir's former literary style' (Shepherd 2003, 198). It is a departure that has often been viewed negatively, with some critics lamenting that it was 'not really Simone de Beauvoir' and making pejorative comparisons with Françoise Sagan (Fallaize 1988, 118).[21] Beauvoir's return to more women-centred fiction writing, and in terms of style, content and theme, a text that is arguably far closer to being 'really Simone de Beauvoir' (however contentious this re-formulation itself might be), is thus again knocked by the masculine world of literary criticism – although it is eagerly and voraciously consumed by women readers. Fallaize observes in her Introduction to *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader* that, 'although they sold very well, and are clearly amongst the most sophisticated and literary

[21] Fallaize does not share this criticism, but points it out. Keefe is dismissive of the optimism of the ending, arguing that the final tone is purely hollow (1991, 28). Given how consistently the text foregrounds, from the beginning, both Laurence's concerns and sympathies for her daughter, as well as her own emerging self-awareness, Keefe's conclusion seems ill-founded. He may be responding to the incomplete nature of the liberation here, but this itself cannot be seen as entirely empty.

of Beauvoir's fictional texts, they were dismissed as superficial by many critics who failed to grasp the radical new tack which Beauvoir's fictional writing had taken' (1998, 5). There was astonishment at her switch to 'women's subjects' in *Les Belles Images* (ibid., 8), and this astonished response extended to her final fiction work, *La Femme rompue.*

The Madwoman on the Threshold of Feminine Liberation: *La Femme rompue*

La Femme rompue (1967) followed just one year after *Les Belles Images*, and is another strongly feminocentric text. Beauvoir's corpus of fiction comes full circle with this triptych of short stories that closes her œuvre just as the short story cycle *Quand prime le spirituel* opened it. Focalised through three central women characters, here the first-person female voice and the madwoman are fully united to dominate the text throughout. The very decision to publish the eponymous third story of the trilogy, 'La Femme rompue' in serialized form in the women's magazine *Elle* (9 Oct – 16 Nov 1967), reveals an openness to a female consciousness strikingly different from Beauvoir's earlier situation and attitude.[22] We may speculate that this new context led to an empathy with women, however unconscious, which had long been successfully repressed, in the back of a drawer along with *Quand prime*'s manuscript. She states of the motivations for writing *La Femme rompue*:

> J'avais récemment reçu les confidences de plusieurs femmes d'une quarantaine d'années que leurs maris venaient de quitter pour une autre [...] il y avait dans toutes leurs histoires d'intéressantes similitudes : elles ne comprenaient rien à ce qui leur arrivait [...] elles se débattaient dans l'ignorance et l'idée même m'est venue de *donner à voir leur nuit*. (TCF 1998, 175 ; my emphasis)

This final phrase, 'donner à voir leur nuit' is revealing. Beauvoir's aim in writing these stories was to bring *light* to these women's darkness, thereby *removing* (dark) ignorance. But this is not what she says. The phrase literally means to bring their darkness into sight, and Beauvoir in fact brings the darkness into sight to such an extent it swamps the text's 'light'.

The 'void' Terry Keefe saw in *Quand prime*, the 'vide' that Anne hovered over in the early collection and which threatened Laurence from within, now erupts at the heart of Beauvoir's

[22] Dow (2009) and Moi (1990) detail the circumstances of publication.

final text, and it is here that semiotic madness achieves its greatest expression within Beauvoir's *écriture*. The eponymous title of the final story itself speaks of this explosion. Although it is generally read as encompassing the negative denotations conveyed more unequivocally in the English translation, *The Woman Destroyed*, the French retains the full ambivalent nuance of the term *rompue*, which can mean: separated as in broken off from a relationship; torn apart, broken or fragmented as in the English verb destroyed, here connoting physical destruction as well as more psychological collapse; but significantly it can also mean interrupted, as in a flow of something that has its continuity broken and most positively, it can mean skilled, deft, capable or clever, 'très habile, parfaitement exercé dans un domaine particulier'.[23] This potential for a positive reading of the apparent destruction in the title is important in relation to my reading of madness and the madwoman here.

La Femme rompue was, at the time of its publication, a short story cycle unique to Beauvoir's corpus. It is a remarkable text, perhaps her most radical, and it continues to fascinate and fluster critics.[24] As with the narrative of *Les Belles Images*, each of the stories here is focalised through, and narrated by, a single woman character. This continues the previous text's uniquely woman-centred approach, again differing from all her earlier fiction publications at this time. Incredibly, Keefe sees this as a weakness:

> her range in these two books is, admittedly, extremely narrow, so that it might legitimately be asked whether a broader perspective on some of the issues would not have produced a more balanced treatment. After all, we only ever see men and the role they play in events through the eyes of women here, and [...] this is perhaps not entirely satisfactory. (1983, 221)

It must be argued, on the contrary, that finally daring to return to the feminine beginnings of *Quand prime* shows a radical confidence and a belief in the urgency of telling women's stories entirely consistent with Beauvoir's explicitly feminist attitude at this point. Undoubtedly, she is trying to say something here *about* women's madness, and the text can be read as a

[23] See *Trésor de la langue française:* http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?17;s=66883695;b=13;r=1;nat=;i=1; [Accessed 5/11/14]
[24] The readings of Dow (2009), Moi (1990), Fallaize (1990), Keefe (1991) are some key examples of the polemic it inspires.

mimetic transposition, an illustration, of the feminism of *Le Deuxième Sexe*.[25] However, that she 'loses control' of this text is also clear, and much has been made of the disparity between on the one hand the 'intended authorial reading' of the third story as outlined by Beauvoir herself in *Tout compte fait*, where she insists on the text's condemnation of Monique as *coupable* and a complicit victim in her oppression (1998, 176), and on the other hand, the sympathetic conclusion drawn by almost all female readers.[26] I argue here that the value and significance of this text are not so much in what Beauvoir writes *about* madness but rather what the madness she *writes* says through her text. As Dow points out, 'Beauvoir unleashes upon her text a power that will ultimately exceed her control' (2009, 103).

Opening with traditional Symbolic linearity and grammatical order, the text soon dissolves into semiotic disruption of that Symbolic, until it comes into confrontation with its own madness and this semiotic potential. Beauvoir here completes the transformation, faltering in *Les Belles Images,* of the mad other into the mad *subject* speaking in the text of itself, as the madwoman holds the *je* position throughout. A study of three women's varying degrees of descent into madness due to their responses to their situations of marriage, motherhood, advancing age and abandonment by husbands, the critical distance between the text and the mad other is soon eroded and the text becomes imbricated in the subjectivity of the mad *je*. Shoshana Felman asks whether, 'écrire *sur* la folie....et parler la folie ne se rencontrent-ils pas quelque part?' (1978, 14), and in *La Femme rompue* the dichotomy between the subject and object of madness is collapsed. Beauvoir is seduced into the loss of control described above by Dow by the temptations of the short fiction genre. The first-person narrative of all three stories provides a liberating intimacy, inviting the author to let her guard down. The mask slips. Beauvoir has ceded to the mad temptations of the semiotic *je*.

From the first to the last *nouvelle,* there is a regressive progression or unwinding of the Symbolic order of language through an increasingly semiotic disposition that comes face to face with the Real or a tearing through of the semiotic in the final page. This semiotic evolution is perhaps the most linear logic of the text, although it also depends on a circular logic of reading meaning backwards and forwards simultaneously, as each story inflects the other and in my view the full import of what is at stake cannot be understood without reading

[25] Both Dow (2009) and Moi (1990) recognize this.
[26] See for example Dow (2009), Moi (1990) and Keefe (1991). This is another example of the hierarchical 'second writing' of the fiction through the autobiography that I discuss earlier in this chapter.

all three stories together. Many readings regrettably focus only, or predominantly, on the final story, and do not read the trilogy as a thematic whole, therefore losing the semantic effect of the holistic approach.[27] Fallaize provides one of the most perceptive readings, rightly recognizing this bifurcating process in which the reader feels the first two stories are a preparation for the last while also 'the last story may reveal something affecting the decoding of the stories as a whole' (1988, 155).

We move from the Symbolic unnamed protagonist of the first story, 'L'Âge de discrétion', via the bitter, vengeful Murielle of 'Monologue' stuck in the living death of the Imaginary, or semiotic excess, to Monique, the eponymous 'femme rompue' who through her liberating questioning of a phallogocentric Symbolic, releases the potential of the semiotic and comes to a confrontation with the Real, or the Kristevan semiotic. Language is the vehicle as well as the target of this development. As the stories progress, the conventional language of 'L'Âge de discrétion' falters, sliding into poetic disorder in the logorrheic excess of 'Monologue' and falls into increasingly semiotic gaps and silences in 'La Femme rompue'. All three stories deal self-consciously with communication/non-communication, and question the limits of language, the construction of meaning through language, and the subjectivity of truth. As it evolves, the collection recognizes the potential of semiotic madness and may be seen – however briefly – most fully to realize this potential for Beauvoir's *écriture*. The (phallo)logos, the logic of patriarchal culture and language, is questioned or relinquished and the resulting breaking down of meaning and language reveals the gap in reality or sense that is madness. Monique in the final story cries of all that language cannot contain:

> les mots ne disent rien. Les rages, les cauchemars, l'horreur, ça échappe aux mots. Je mets des choses sur le papier quand je reprends des forces, dans le désespoir ou l'espoir. Mais la déconfiture, l'abrutissement, la décomposition, ce n'est pas marqué sur ces pages. Et puis elles mentent tant, elles se trompent tant. (FR 222)

The use of the feminine plural pronoun *elles*, referring grammatically to 'ces pages' implicitly evokes the *elles* of the three female protagonists, and arguably women in the general sense. Beauvoir here condemns the extent to which women deceive themselves, but she also

[27] Both Dow and Moi (1990) read the final story in isolation. Dow (2009) offers a perceptive reading, though perhaps over-focused on the conflicts between reader-reception and authorial intention.

exposes this self-deception in the process of demystification that operates in the narrative, and if we read this statement in light of *Les Belles Images*, the alternative to this self-deception is lucid, panicked madness and rejection of the truth of the 'Father'.

An intricate set of axes of relationships structures *La Femme rompue*. In all three stories we see the female narrator-protagonists' horizontal and vertical relationships, meaning those with their partners, their children, and their parents, in varying degrees of crisis. We may read the women's husbands as tropes for their horizontal relationships with present Symbolic or patriarchal language, while the vertical relationships with their children represent the potential for future language (as with *Les Belles Images*). A second layer of vertical relationships emerges, particularly in 'Monologue' and 'La Femme rompue' between the women and their fathers, representing past, acquired or inherited language, as well as the characters' process of insertion into language and culture, reminiscent of the focus of the paternal influence over Laurence in *Les Belles Images*.

The unnamed female narrator in 'L'Âge de discrétion' is a married woman and a writer, who is heavily invested in both Symbolic language and in her relationships with the male figures of her husband André and her son, Philippe. A crisis in her marriage and the complete breakdown of her relationship with her son both coincide with linguistic and psychological crises resembling that of Laurence in *Les Belles Images*, 'les fichiers, le papier blanc m'invitaient à travailler; mais les mots qui dansaient dans ma tête m'empêchaient de me concentrer' (FR 11) and '[l]es mots se décomposaient dans ma tête: amour, entente, désaccord, c'étaient des bruits, dénués de sens. En avaient-ils jamais eu?' (66). She appears to sink into a depressive 'néant' (FR 57), similar to Marcelle in *Quand prime*. This is the most stylistically traditional, 'the most conventionally organised' (Fallaize 1988, 156), of the three stories, and ultimately the woman writer recovers her sanity and her faith in language, and is reconciled with her husband: 'De nouveau nous pouvions nous parler' (FR 79) and:

> Je retrouvais les vieux mots dans ma gorge, tels qu'ils avaient été écrits. Ils m'unissaient aux siècles anciens où les astres brillaient exactement comme aujourd'hui. Et cette renaissance et cette permanence me donnaient une impression d'éternité [...] – Voilà le privilège de la littérature, ai-je dit. Les images se déforment, elles pâlissent. Les mots, on les emporte avec soi. (FR 80)

What she sees as a 'renaissance' is in fact a return to the reassuring but ossified language of the ancients, where she can be comforted with a sense of permanence and continuity, where she takes her place in a masculine lineage, but there is no change or rejuvenation. It is a return to Symbolic classicism, not a linguistic rebirth. Her language is more of the same old thing, and in fact her most recent publication is slated by critics as 'rabâchage'(FR 59), literally going over the same old things. Writers cited and mentioned are drawn from the canon of old masters, including Balzac, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Euripedes, reflecting Beauvoir's own identification with the male canon. The dominance of patriarchal language is restored, and the woman has gained no insight, 'Though she has faced up to a certain number of her illusions and declares herself determined to face reality, she remains enmeshed in a special use of words' (Fallaize 1988, 160). She has chosen not to relinquish her position in the Symbolic sphere, remaining sane but foregoing the insight she might otherwise have won. The mad lucidity offered through semiotic madness is covered over, and screened by language, 'Ne pas regarder trop loin. Au loin c'étaient les horreurs de la mort et des adieux' (FR 83). We see here a similar dynamic of semiotic exposure and re-covery as in *Les Belles Images*.

The sense of incompletion extends to the narrator's reconciliation with her husband. Although in the end they open up to each other and realise their temporary estrangement was the result of a misunderstanding, and the narrator feels that '[e]ntre lui et moi il me semblait que déjà tout était redevenu pareil' (FR 79), this contradicts her earlier sense of a permanent schism:

> C'était fini; nous étions réconciliés. Mais nous étions-nous tout dit? Moi en tout cas, non. Quelque chose me restait sur le cœur [...] cet orage avait été trop bref pour rien changer entre nous: mais n'était-il pas le signe que depuis quelque temps – quand? – imperceptiblement quelque chose avait changé. (FR 47)

Although their former symbiosis is restored, something insisted on with the repetition of the first-person plural pronoun 'nous' seven times in the closing five lines of the story, this smooth union comes at the cost of the woman really looking deeply into things, or beyond the narrow horizon of the couple, 'ne pas regarder trop loin' (83). This smoothed-over fracture and the metonymic split with her son, the future bearer of patriarchal language, portend the deeper crisis in the two subsequent stories and reveal the early signs of the disengagement of the

woman (writer) from a masculine, patriarchal linguistic disposition that is not achieved in this first *nouvelle,* but accomplished in the final story where Monique *does* dare (of necessity) to cast her gaze beyond the horizon of her couple.

Examining the style in this most traditional of the three stories reveals even here the embryonic poetic lyricism of a more semiotic language.[28] Traditional syntax, punctuation and grammar are largely preserved, however repetition is frequent, mirroring the obsessive tendency of the protagonist's crisis and the circularity creeping in through the story's – and collection's - linearity. Time, a vector of Symbolic logic, is an important motif here as in both other stories. The collection's very first line foregrounds temporal elasticity: 'Ma montre est-elle arrêtée? Non. Mais les aiguilles n'ont pas l'air de tourner. Ne pas les regarder' (FR 9), and we see a leitmotif developed throughout the text echoing Kristeva's distinction between 'historic' (or Symbolic) time and 'woman's time', dominated by repetition, rhythm and circularity (Kristeva 1986). Time is still obeying its Symbolic logic (the watch has not stopped) but the narrator has a perception of elasticity, an alternative temporal logic according to which Symbolic time no longer matches women's experience of it, but which in the end she determines to ignore, 'ne pas les regarder'. This contrast of traditional temporal logic with a sense of timelessness or alternative temporality, also present in the corpus of Santos and Lê, intensifies during the protagonist's period of estrangement from her husband André, and she feels an '[é]trange coupure entre ces deux rythmes. Au galop mes jours m'échappent et en chacun d'eux je languis' and her life is both being swept away by crashing waves and draining away slowly drop by drop (FR 64-5).

In the second story, 'Monologue', the intense pain of the narrator-protagonist Murielle is tangible through Symbolic excess disordered by a corollary semiotic excess: there is too much language and it is out of control. The text rushes breathlessly headlong through passages and pages of words with little punctuation or pause, leaving the reader exhausted. This is Beauvoir's most mad piece of writing. It is the most experimental of the three stories, indeed of the whole corpus, the most perplexing, and the most neglected. Here the woman's madness is a paranoid logorrhea of vitriol spitting back against patriarchy's wrongs (this

[28] Holland (2009) again offers a comprehensive review of the poetic excess and transgression of the language in *La Femme rompue*.

vengeful spirit is flagged up by the Flaubertian epigraph, 'Elle se venge par le monologue').[29] The language is markedly oral and colloquial and the register is gutterally *familier* and replete with expletives, *argot* and aggressive vituperation. The first words of the story, 'Les cons!' (FR 87) set the tone, reinforced throughout the first pages with 'Salauds' (87, 88, 90 [twice]); 'dégueux' (87); 'fric' (88); 'rien à foutre' (88); 'tantouze', 'pédé', 'dondon' (89); 'débecter' (90).[30] The grammarian Théagène in *Mémoires* appears to have ceded all control to a crazed poetic Euphorion as syntax, punctuation and coherence are abandoned to produce a rhythmic, rhyming text, 'on devient bon pour le cabanon' (88); 'Des éclats oui j'en ai fait dans ma vie' (91); 'les portières claquent ils crient ils rient' (95). Meaning, rather than breaking from fractures in language as in *Les Belles Images*, attacks the reader as words swamp the text and swamp each other, producing signification but considerable ambiguity. In tone, style and some elements of content, this story is a foretaste of the writing of Emma Santos.

This monologue, narrated entirely by the madwoman, produces a narrow, singular subjective perspective directly expressing a psychological state and in this respect it contrasts with the narrative describing, but never narrated by, *Quand prime*'s madwoman Anne.[31] The narrator, Murielle, is unnamed, like her counterpart in 'L'Âge de discrétion', until half-way through the story. Her monologue drowns out all other voices. She makes pathetic, fruitless attempts to re-establish communication with her second husband Tristan, and with her mother, but while her ex-husband entertains her bilious invective ranting, his indulgence is ultimately deaf and the communication is utterly dysfunctional. The violence of her rage prevents reconciliation and social reintegration. Her telephone calls to her mother are more aggressively rejected, with her mother simply hanging up. Alienated from the mother, and alienating the Symbolic-husband, Murielle retreats into an isolated, disempowering interiority, where she is denied access to the Symbolic, partly because she has attempted to exert a tyrannical control over her children and her husband. In fact, she has *two* ex-husbands,

[29] Although the monologue is vituperatively negative, there is a certain dark humour relieving the bile, as in the idea of a sadistic doctor giving Murielle suppositories with which she must '[se] bourrer comme un canon' (FR 88; 101) or the desire for robots to bring her drinks to avoid having to leave her armchair (FR 92).

[30] The word 'salaud(s)' occurs fifteen times in this short thirty-one page *nouvelle*.

[31] It is interesting to note the similar position of Anne and Murielle's stories, structurally both at the centre of their respective collections – the dark hearts of the texts. The parallel between the characters is limited, as Murielle, the narrator here, is the mother of the girl who has committed suicide, Sylvie, apparently in exhausted frustration at her controlling mother, and Murielle is therefore in the position of Mme Vignon and not of Anne. Fallaize argues that Murielle's monologue could be read as a sequel to Mme Vignon's monologue in *Quand prime* (1988, 143-4).

symbolizing both her Symbolic excess and her double divorce from Symbolic control. Significantly, it is Murielle's daughter who has killed herself, and Murielle has lost custody (control) of her son, figuring the future impossibility of linguistic transmission, whether masculine or feminine. We are led to understand that Murielle's tyrannical mothering has caused Sylvie's suicide. This confronts her with the horror of the Real, and Murielle withdraws to the Imaginary in which she retains a connection with her daughter. This refuge is far removed from the reassuring plenitude of the nostalgic pre-Oedipal reconnection with the mother that can be identified as a positive value of the semiotic, and so valorized by later post-Lacanian French Feminism.

Murielle is paralyzed by the compulsion to repeat this trauma from which she cannot free herself, revisiting the fatal event repeatedly, 'Toute ma vie il sera deux heures de l'après-midi un mardi de juin' (FR 111). Linear time is speeding out of control, circular woman's time is paralysed and the hands on the watch have stopped. Her dark bedroom has become a living tomb where she exists as though buried along with her daughter, in semiotic suspension, 'C'était moi qu'on enterrait. Je suis enterrée' (FR 99) and '[q]uel silence! Plus une auto plus un pas dans la rue pas un bruit dans la maison un silence de mort. Le silence de la chambre mortuaire' (111). She is, however, also desperately trying to move, either way – towards unity with 'le Tout' in death, 'j'aime mieux mourir' (113) or towards reconnection with the Symbolic, 'je veux vivre je veux revivre' (99), and again in this *limen* between life and death, she resembles Santos' narrator. Marked by impotent immobility and *dépaysement*, 'J'étais faite pour une autre planète je me suis trompée de destination' (FR 107), Murielle is the 'merle blanc' (106).

Extreme psychological chaos is mirrored in the syntactical and chronological disorder and linguistic excess of a text with minimal punctuation, radically different from 'L'Âge de discrétion'. The thematic two-speed movement of time is amplified and echoed linguistically, as repetition both drives the narrative forward and arrests it at moments of paralysis, 'J'en ai marre marre marre marre [...] marre marre marre marre', where the word *marre* is repeated eighty-one times (FR 96). It is less a stream of consciousness than a verbal regurgitation. Fantasy and reality are difficult to separate for the reader, as for the narrator. The linguistic din emanating from her own mind prevents silence from offering solace, and the erosion of syntax, grammar and punctuation results in traumatic *charivari,* represented figuratively by the racket on the streets outside her room, a 'tam-tam' (FR 104) of shouts, bangs and 'klaxons'

(87, 95). Noteworthy is the frequent heavy alliteration of the maternal letter 'm': the example above with *marre*; 'ma mère ma propre mère' (FR 112); 'jaime mieux mourir' (113) and the poetic, alliterative and assonant chiasmic formulation, 'ma fille à moi est morte et on m'a volé mon fils' (111) further drawing our attention to the destruction of maternal bonds and the loss of her offspring.

At one point, as Murielle wallows in delusional self-pity regarding her daughter, the text itself pauses while Murielle cries (FR 114), and this provides the only break in the continuous thirty-one pages of text. The semiotic is *present*, but the text wields it aggressively and warps its potential through misery and rage, and the madness here is bereft of empowerment or positivity. Murielle is an alternative incarnation of the abject maternal, Kristeva's *objet chu*, previously embodied in *Les Belles Images*' Dominique. The *cri* that Laurence stifled there is given full voice here. There is great significance in this often-neglected story of the triptych telling of the necessity for harmony and collaboration between the semiotic and the Symbolic. As Kristeva stresses repeatedly in *La Révolution du langage poétique,* the one cannot function without the other – language needs its silences, and silence alone conveys little. Significantly, Murielle expresses the wish to have written her life story, but she cannot: 'Je devrais la raconter ma vie. Tant de femmes le font on les imprime on parle d'elles elles se pavanent et mon livre serait plus intéressant que leurs conneries' (FR 90). She can only speak, roar or bawl her abject misery into the deaf silence.

In the final story, 'La Femme rompue', the first-person narrator Monique is forced to relinquish her existing relationship with the Symbolic, personified in her husband Maurice, who leaves her for a younger woman.[32] Monique's disillusionment with Maurice is matched by the deterioration of her faith in language, similar to the narrator of 'L'Âge de discrétion'. Maurice is a scientist, highly thetic and Symbolic, in Kristevan terms, and attached to truths, 'representing reason and intellect in the text' (Moi 1990, 68). The story is narrated through Monique's diary – and all other characters and all truths are focalised and mediated through this textual communication with the self. Monique is a writing woman, as the producer of the diary-text. Toril Moi flags up how the appearance of the diary form in Beauvoir's work signifies emotional anguish (1994, 245), and Fallaize points out that the diary was explicitly devalorised

[32] This again reproduces the position of Dominique in *Les Belles Images*, and Fullbrook and Fullbrook appear correct in their conclusion that 'Dominique is a "prototype" for the three women of *La Femme rompue*' (1998, 138).

by Beauvoir as a vehicle of self-deception, a 'narrative form of bad faith' (1988, 154), however the extent to which the diary can also be seen here as a vehicle for self-discovery is a point I will return to. Monique's name – Monique Lacombe – reuses the names of the two young characters in *Quand prime*'s 'Chantal' story, combining the forename of Monique Fournier with the surname of Andrée Lacombe. The symbolism here is irresistible – the final heroine of Beauvoir's fiction is a hybrid of two very different young women from her first work (at this point still unpublished), uniting the woman who is 'lost' to an unhappy marriage and unwanted motherhood with the figure of the future-facing woman full of insight, potential and optimism.[33]

To start with, Monique's truths are above all Maurice's truths. She has over-invested in her marriage and the couple forms a symbiotic union similar to the pair in 'L'Âge de discrétion'. Monique's identity is constructed only through her husband's eyes, 'Je ne me voyais même que par ses yeux' (FR 180). Later, she begins to disentangle her own language, or alternative version of the truth, from his lies (which because of the couple's intellectual and emotional symbiosis have been her own lies): 'Je me mentais. Comme je me suis menti!' (223). We witness how her desperate but determined quest for the truth of her relationship with Maurice leads her to discover perhaps the most powerful truth – that there is no truth, as she has been deceived by him for years, by his language, and by her own use of (his) language, 'Faut-il le croire? Je ne me suis pas aveuglée pendant huit ans. Il m'a dit ensuite que c'était faux. Ou est-ce à ce moment-là qu'il mentait? Où est la vérité? existe-t-elle encore?' (FR 184). Dialogue here is overwhelmingly unreliable or entirely mendacious. Holland concludes, 'Monique's conviction that the truth exists to be uncovered is replaced by her acceptance that she will never know what the truth is' (2009, 169), and despite the point that Monique's status as a character is intended to be negative, this final text of Beauvoir's promotes ambiguity, openness and unknowability over the didacticism with which Beauvoir's writing, including her fiction, is usually associated.

Ultimately Monique loses all faith in the (phallo-)logical world of man as she has known it up to this point, 'ce monde a son temps, ses heures, ses lois, son langage, des soucis, des divertissements qui me sont radicalement étrangers' (FR 221-2). Symbolic order, the logos,

[33] Another interesting onomastic echo is the young teenager Marguerite Drin, strongly recalling the name Marguerite Drouffe from *Quand prime*. Drin is homeless and orphaned when Monique meets her by chance and tries to take under her wing. Marguerite comments that in her socially neglected situation, girls like her have to attempt suicide to be taken seriously (FR 124), recalling Anne's suicide in *Quand prime*.

reason and sanity are stripped away completely to reveal the wound of semiotic madness. This is mirrored in the metaphor of the Egyptian statuette that Maurice and Monique bought together, and which consequently figures the symbiotic union their couple has formed. Monique's impending breakdown is prefigured when the statuette is *rompue*, 'elle était cassée' (FR 170), and on the next page we read, 'je tombais et je me suis retrouvée complètement brisée' (171). Although Monique glues the statue back together, it is never the same, and stands 'nue, désolée. Je la prends dans mes mains et je pleure' (FR 232), and in the same passage the necklace which was removed and put back on in *Les Belles Images* is here rejected definitively, 'Je ne peux plus mettre le collier que Maurice m'avait offert' (FR 232). This moment of revelation, mimetically rendered here, reproduces the rationale of *Le Deuxième Sexe* where Beauvoir describes the mature woman realizing she no longer has faith in the culture of 'man' because she has been lied to perhaps her entire life, and finally sees through the hypocrisy of masculine logic, 'il saura prouver qu'il a raison, même s'il a tort. Entre des mains masculines la logique est souvent violence' (DSII 291). Consequently, 'La femme se fie à ses évidences intérieures plutôt qu'à cet étrange monde où le temps avance à reculons, où son double ne lui ressemble plus, où les évènements l'ont trahie. Ainsi est-elle disposée aux extases, aux illuminations, aux délires' (DSII 456). When Maurice continually tells Monique 'tu es folle' (FR 163) and that she should see a psychiatrist (FR 235; 237), she is inclined out of habit to believe him but finally trusts her own instincts and resists his attempt to pathologise her.

A shift occurs in Monique on re-reading her diary on January 15th, after a break of almost two weeks during which the narration has ceased and Monique herself appears to have become trapped in her own thoughts, 'je continuerai à tourner en ronde dans mes pensées [...] Mais alors je continuerai à tourner en ronde dans mes pensées' (FR 221). 'Woman's time' here winds back onto itself. With no Symbolic linearity there is no way out of the psychological maze, and the sense of being trapped in a labyrinth, of semiotic language, of madness, is a predominant theme in the writing of both Emma Santos and Linda Lê. The Symbolic has ceded almost entirely to the semiotic and its silence. Narration is resumed eventually but the relationship to 'linear time' becomes looser, and on resumption the subsequent entry does not bear the logic of a date, headed simply, 'surlendemain' (FR 225) and dates disappear completely from diary entries between the 6th and 20th of February, as a

sense of chronology disintegrates. The diary format makes the gaps or *non-dit* between the *dit* easier to see, more explicitly acknowledging the semiotic silences within the text.

It is crucially important that Monique comes to greater self-knowledge, and to a fuller understanding of phallologic falsity, through re-reading her own diary. In this way, self-authored language is a key to self-discovery. Far from deepening her bad faith, on the contrary, the act of re-reading her own writing with a (self-)critical and open attitude leads to anagnorisis, and the diegesis therefore contradicts the extradiegetic attitude of Beauvoir towards the diary form, and may also be read as unsettling her own explicit denigration of the fiction genre discussed earlier.[34] Re-reading leads to rewriting, and the semiotic power of the *vide* engulfed in *Quand prime* and vomited up in *Les Belles Images* is here the driver for language: 'J'ai repris mon stylo non pour revenir en arrière mais parce que le vide était si immense en moi, autour de moi, qu'il fallait ce geste de ma main pour m'assurer que j'étais encore vivante' (FR 223). The semiotic has become too powerful to subdue or silence, and it speaks to affirm the woman's existence. This new relationship to language replaces the previous Symbolic relationship reliant on her husband – but is not constructed through an alienating self-image.

The final section of 'La Femme rompue' bears close examination. Here the text confronts the protagonist-madwoman, and the reader, with the liberating semiotic potential of madness. Monique has returned to the empty womb-room of her flat, Maurice having definitively left her for his mistress, Noëllie. Monique sits alone, facing two closed doors. She knows she has the power to choose, to act, and to open the door to Maurice's office, the Symbolic nerve-centre of linguistic production (the other door leads to their/her bedroom, which may be viewed, in the context of the final scene of *Les Belles Images*, as the locus of abnegation). Should she forego the agency inherent in this choice, the alternative is '[n]e pas bouger; jamais. Arrêter le temps et la vie' (FR 252). The text in its very last lines projects with the future tense into action, into agency:

> Mais je sais que je bougerai. La porte s'ouvrira lentement et je verrai ce qu'il y a derrière la porte. C'est l'avenir. La porte de l'avenir va s'ouvrir. Lentement. Implacablement. *Je suis*

[34] Holland follows Fallaize in also reading the diary (and language and writing) as a vehicle for recovery and self-discovery here, 'Monique uses her diary to (re)construct her identity, to discover who she is' (Holland 2009, 180-1; Fallaize 1988, 167; 171).

> *sur le seuil*. Il n'y a que cette porte et ce qui guette derrière. J'ai peur. (FR 252; my emphasis)

There is one thought between the latter line and its repetition, 'Et je ne peux appeler personne au secours' and finally, isolated on the page, 'J'ai peur' (ibid.), and we are reminded of the fear crippling Laurence (and Dominique) in *Les Belles Images,* and this foreshadows the fearful tone dominating Santos' corpus. No-one can help Monique, and this woman must face and create the future by herself and for herself. We are on the threshold of a future previously unseen and unimagined, one severed from the dominance of the masculine language of patriarchal phallogocentrism. The woman is now not facing herself, not alienated into an image of herself as in *Quand prime* and *Les Belles Images*. She is facing forward. Significantly, this line also marks the end of Beauvoir's fiction writing, and this is the last work of fiction she produced. Monique sits facing the Real, the future, where Beauvoir cannot take us, and the hesitant moment anticipating the act of crossing the threshold remains perpetually suspended.

Rather than reading this, as a number of critics including Fallaize, as a total and totally negative descent into madness, we may see Monique's final madness in fact as completely lucid. Dow, rightly in my view, observes that Beauvoir implies in this *dénouement*, 'that madness ensues only, and paradoxically, once Monique emerges from her self-deception into a position of lucidity from which she is able to know her previous *déraison*' (2009, 111). We have been told that Maurice has sent his wife to the psychiatrist, Dr Marquet, who tells her she is *not* in danger of going mad. Monique's response is to regret that the refuge or release of madness is not open to her, 'Devenir folle: ça serait une bonne manière de me défiler' (FR 239). These three stories, culminating in these closing lines, encapsulate how terrifying a prospect it is for women to heed the feminist exhortation of Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* and take responsibility for themselves, thereby refusing Symbolic security. We may read the destruction of identity here as definitive or regenerative, although the certainty of future action in 'je bougerai' encourages the latter. If we read the closing lines in tandem with the story's opening, where Monique has taken up writing, 'je me suis mise à écrire *pour moi-même*, comme à vingt ans' and 'je veux *vivre enfin un peu pour moi*' (FR 122-3; my emphasis), we see that Beauvoir has already hinted at Monique's potential, and perhaps also her own.

We might be tempted to read here Beauvoir's nostalgia for the liberty of expression she evidently enjoyed with *Quand prime* and was, to some extent, subsequently robbed of.

Monique, as Murielle and the *déclassée* Dominique in *Les Belles Images*, has suffered a social, Symbolic death in the loss of her husband. However, by contrast, she is not rendered abject by the text, she is not the *objet chu* but rather the *sujet sémiotique,* or the *sujet-en-procès*. Freed from dependence on her Symbolic-husband, Monique looks in terrified awe at the abyss which, if she traverses, may allow her to rebuild her own language. Crucially, the vertical mother-daughter relationship in this last story is *not* severed as in both 'L'Âge de discrétion' and 'Monologue', as Monique retains a functioning communication with her daughters, Lucienne and Colette, and there is potential for these relationships to be deepened. The sense of possibility for linguistic legacy, or the transmission of a more semiotically-inflected linguistic disposition along the female line is preserved. Although Lucienne has followed a traditional path into marriage, Colette is independent and self-defining.[35] The triadic linguistic structure formed by these three women offers an optimistic metonym for the future development of more semiotically-infused linguistic dispositions.

Reading the trilogy holistically, *La Femme rompue* presents three women offered insight through mad linguistic crisis, two of whom fail to grasp the potential of the understanding gained as a result, for contrasting reasons. For Foucault, what he calls 'la folie tragique', which can be seen as an alternative conception of semiotic madness as I have outlined in the Introduction, for the person suffering, is 'le déchirement absolu qui l'ouvre sur l'autre monde' (1972, 60). Monique is in the grip of a 'déchirement absolu' which leaves her facing a new world redefined by herself, just as Beauvoir's text is on the threshold of the new social and literary world of French feminism and writing in the decade following 1968.[36]

[35] The name Colette is also closely linked to female creation, evoking the Belle Époque novelist and Beauvoir's close friend, novelist and screenwriter Colette Audry.

[36] Holland's close analysis of language and style in *La Femme rompue* leads her to conclude that 'the semiotic has broken through "the strict rational defences of conventional meaning"' (2002, 11). Citing Susan Sellers' *Language and Sexual Difference* (1991, 145) Holland also argues that the textual strategies at work in the text's madness 'correspond to aspects of feminine writing' despite Beauvoir's persistent refusal of the ideologies of the *écriture féminine* movement, as it 'deconstructs the all-powerful, all-knowing "I" and calls into question conventional notions of character as a stable, unified construct' (Holland 2009, 160).

Putting the Symbolic Mask Back in Place

Beauvoir's *La Femme rompue* presents a narrative, on one level, condemnatory of the madwoman. At the same time, it produces its own counter-narrative of liberation of the female subject from a phallogocentric Symbolic linguistic disposition, a liberation which operates through the breakdown of madness preceding renaissance. However, having exposed the potential of semiotic madness, Beauvoir then set about retrospectively trying to cure the text of its madness and its polysemic quality. Her multiple statements in *Tout Compte Fait* (1972) aiming to control the meaning of *La Femme rompue* contradict her comments elsewhere celebrating ambiguity and a Barthesian relationship between text and reader, for example in *La Force des choses*: 'un livre c'est un objet collectif: les lecteurs contribuent autant que l'auteur à le créer' (FCI 60). As we have seen, Holland sees this 'second writing' as 'a bid to contain the madness in the text, as a defence against chaos' (2009, 19). Why such a need to resume control and re-impose logic on her text? We may consider that in her oscillation between the Symbolic father and semiotic mother, Beauvoir in *La Femme rompue* swings too far towards the mother for comfort, and then pushes into reverse. The female voice here roars too loudly, and, terrifying its subject, is silenced.

Having gained sufficient confidence in the twilight of her career to explore the potential of mad resistance to the logos, Beauvoir then appears to cede to the anxiety of authority that accompanies this attitude. Consequently, her writing project then retreats back the full length of her text to a position closer to that of the narrator in 'L'Âge de discrétion', as this radical, experimental, 'mad' text is the last piece of fiction she wrote, all her writing thereafter being autobiographical or political. The nameless woman writer in the first short story is discouraged by the failure of her latest publication, apparently criticised because of its poor attempt to innovate, 'J'avais voulu trouver un autre angle: je ne le trouverais pas' (FR 68). She is frustrated because she knows her writing has become stale, rooted in a classic masculine heritage. Flicking through the Garnier and Pléiade editions on her mother-in-law's bookshelves, she thinks:

> Qu'avaient-ils à m'apporter, ces écrivains qui m'avaient faite ce que j'étais et ne cesserais plus d'être? J'en ai ouvert, feuilleté quelques volumes; ils avaient tous un goût presque écœurant que celui de mes propres livres: un goût de poussière. (FR 76)

The canon of male writers she inscribed herself in, and who formed her intellectually, now operates as a barrier to innovation and evolution, a barrier she cannot entirely overcome. The narrator-writer gives up the search for originality, 'En gros, mon œuvre restera ce qu'elle est: j'ai vu mes limites' (FR 83), declaring that she cannot see herself changing now and that 'mon œuvre était arrêtée, finie' (68). It is worth considering these lines in relation to Beauvoir. A literary figure heavily invested in her position within the Symbolic, and arguably, too much a product of her generation, she lacked the confidence to step through the door facing her, thus remaining 'a transitional figure arrested on the threshold of a new world' (Moi 1994, 211).

I return to Beauvoir's statement at the end of *Le Deuxième Sexe*:

> la femme qui choisit de raisonner, de s'exprimer selon les techniques masculines aura à cœur d'étouffer *une singularité dont elle se défie* [...] elle imitera la rigueur, la vigueur virile [...] mais elle se sera imposée de répudier *tout ce qu'il y avait en elle de « différent »* (DSII 622-3; my emphasis).

This assertion of singularity and difference from the intellectual woman who consistently refused to acknowledge such a thing as 'feminine writing' appears to concede unequivocally a unique linguistic and sexual difference inherent to women. To this extent it chimes with the comment made to Jardine in 1977 on writing 'as a woman'. The statement above, though, also sees any such female difference necessarily having to be sacrificed in the conventional intellectual woman. Arguably, in *La Femme rompue* (and to a lesser extent also in *Les Belles Images*) Beauvoir reclaims from silence the uniquely 'différent' voice she began to discover with *Quand prime*, but at the same moment relegates it again to silence. Beauvoir never wrote fiction again, although she *did* finally publish her most feminocentric text, *Quand prime*, thirteen years later – and, given its painful history, this could be seen as a courageous act.

Having probed what could be considered the most powerful, feminine aspect of her voice, Beauvoir then abandoned fiction definitively to focus on autobiography and the autogenographical construction of her political self. This constructed image of an independent, unmarried intellectual woman winning in a man's world was so fundamental to her political feminist project that she could not afford to allow its collapse. Beauvoir arguably felt the same necessity she describes in *Le Deuxième Sexe,* in the quotation above, to repudiate her sexual difference, and re-establish the distance between herself and the

'Other', allowing her to resume her position as the 'One' of culture, language and sexual politics.[37] A reading of *La Femme rompue* that might threaten the decades of work invested in building her reputation, her path to immortality, had to be quashed. The Symbolic mask is fixed back in place. In *Le Deuxième Sexe* Beauvoir renders a major service to the cause of feminism with a highly rational, sane text, while in *La Femme rompue* she points suggestively to the presence of truths beyond the reason of man in a text which speaks of an alternative mad lucidity.

Both *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* are texts oriented towards a future belonging to the next generation of young women. Those young women, to paraphrase Laurence, would have their chance, to a great extent thanks to the feminist writing and activism of Simone de Beauvoir. In the evolution of her writerly voice, from feminocentric beginnings through the hermaphrodite peak of her career to the return of female dominance, now in crisis, Beauvoir seems to come crashing up against the 'mother-body' of the semiotic, which causes problems for the coherence of her intransigent anti-essentialism. Beauvoir's corpus of fiction has moved from the shiny surface of the *sou neuf*'s hermetic subjectivity to the dark heart of language itself. On the eve of major social and political changes that saw radical new feminisms and new women's writing come into being, *La Femme rompue* clearly stands as a signpost indicating the direction that some feminist writing in France would take, as we shall see in the next chapter on Emma Santos.

[37] See Fullbrook & Fullbrook (1993) for a full discussion of Beauvoir's stubborn insistence on this autobiographical construction of both her political and personal persona, and her 'existential couple' with Sartre.

-- Chapter Three --

Through the Looking Glass into the Labyrinth: The Semiotic Revolution of Emma Santos

The writing of Emma Santos takes us across the threshold imagined in the late fiction of Simone de Beauvoir, into the bowels of an attempted semiotic revolution *of* language *through* a language rendered mad in a semiotic textual practice. Revolt becomes revolution. The *cri* that Beauvoir's female protagonists struggled to produce is articulated by Santos in what Beauvoir described as 'un cri écrit'.[1] This linguistic revolution presents a lucid semiotic madness, a (re)constructed poetic insanity deployed in order to deconstruct the sanity of language. Santos breaks language down in order to remake a new linguistic (and social) order. Emma Santos produced nine texts (including one play) between 1971 and 1979, and all were published in the 1970s, apart from the last, *Effraction au réel*, which did not appear until 2006, for reasons which I will elaborate on later. The first eight of her nine works feature a central female narrator-protagonist named Emma who experiences mental illness, hospitalisation and treatment, and who is also a writer. I see these eight narrators as variations along a continuum of the same character, with *Effraction au réel* presenting a significant change in this respect. I will focus in this chapter mainly on her early trilogy, *L'Illulogicienne* (1971), *La Malcastrée* (1973) and *La Loméchuse* (1973), as offering the best examples of her thematics of mad revolution and the strength of her writing. I also take the opportunity to consider the importance of her final publication, *Effraction au réel* (2006), which has been thus far critically ignored, but which has much of interest to offer. This chapter situates Santos' corpus in a more accurate biographical context, with the benefit of the first direct contact with the author's family for an Anglo-American researcher.

With Santos' corpus the madwoman breaks through the mirror of identity and subjectivity in an attempt to harness madness as a positive strategy in order to effect her revolution and reproduce a new *enfant-langage*, a new lingusitic disposition. To this extent she reflects

[1] This description was apparently made in a letter replying to one sent to Beauvoir by the young Santos, and is reported by Santos' narrator in *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique:* 'Je reçois une lettre amicale et bienveillante de Simone de Beauvoir. Un cri écrit, dit-elle' (1977, 48). This exchange of letters offers a sense of female literary inheritance between the two women, positioning Santos as a literary daughter of Beauvoir.

themes and a style common to the advocates of *écriture féminine* in the 1970s including Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Annie Leclerc, and also embraces a poetic revolution in the semiotic mode of Kristeva's conception.[2] I will argue, however, that this broken mirror and broken language leave her stuck in an a-positional liminality, a labyrinth of language and madness from which she cannot escape, 'le labyrinthe de la perte d'identité' (Bott 1973), which persists until perhaps the moment of sublimation of semiotic madness in the surrealist *Effraction au réel*. Santos' *écriture* displays the full force and power of semiotic madness in language, realising the potential hinted at in the more radical writing of Beauvoir. However, it also brings narrator, author and reader to the limits of language, exposing the risks of semiotic linguistic revolution and the threat this presents for the writing subject. In this way, the corpus offers an important perspective on the limits of the potential for protest in women's madness as a trope and a textual practice, as well as on Kristeva's semiotic politics and on elements of the celebratory difference politics of those feminist writers and thinkers commonly viewed as contributing to the 1970s feminist canon.

Santos' writing should be seen as more than simply a 'psychiatric memoir', rather as the expression of an aesthetic and linguistic feminist politics, however much it is also deeply personal.[3] I will trace here an evolution in the corpus' textual practice from mad revolution to frustrated fetishisation, finally concluding in a surrealist sublimation. In the early triptych, Santos articulates (through a disarticulated expression) her semiotic revolution in a mad textual practice. This shifts in the middle five works of fiction and theatre into a sense of deep frustration at the failure of this revolution to be acknowledged and so produces a fetishised textual practice. In her last novel this is sublimated into a surrealist reinscription of her writing into a canon of mad male writers. Because of the heavily psychoanalytically-informed discourse in these texts, it would be almost impossible to approach them without psychoanalytic tools. Therefore, I use Kristeva's post-Lacanian feminist psychoanalytic theory more extensively in this chapter to examine in particular the motifs and metaphors of madness, maternity, childhood, abortion and suicide. I question the extent to which Santos' assumption of *folie* is empowering or effective, and argue that although it produces radical,

[2] Santos is often associated with 1970s French feminism and *écriture féminine*. See for example Kuizenga (1989) and Pagès (1983). Elsa Polverel clarifies the ambivalence of Santos' links to the M.L.F. (2014), an ambivalence articulated by Santos in her corpus, in particular in *Écris et tais-toi* (1978).

[3] The 'psychiatric memoir' as a literary genre is described in Susannah Wilson's *Voices from the Asylum* (2010, 4).

innovative and exciting texts, it ultimately risks abjection and marginalisation, both of the writing and of the author.

As I have discussed in the Introduction, Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) argues that women authors of the Victorian era such as Charlotte Brontë manifested their anxiety of female authorship in the figure of the madwoman (paradigmatically personified by Bertha Mason), and then operated a textual repression of that anxiety – and the madwoman's potential for protest – by locking her in the attic. In the late twentieth century, the madwoman of women's own writing is still a very prevalent metaphor of the anxieties produced by the struggle of the female author to assert and attain her place within language. In the same year that *The Madwoman in the Attic* first appeared, Santos was completing her corpus, in which she displays, decries, scrutinizes and satirizes her own experience of madness, her resulting internment and her feminism. The madwoman who was mute, incarcerated and objectified in Thornfield Hall, in Santos' writing is freed from that attic and running rampant through the text, dominating the textual space as the central narrator-protagonist. However, she is still subjected to internment by society and appears to cede to self-confinement in a locus of asociality and self-abjection.[4] Therefore, while the madwoman has emerged from the attic of the text, she is still arguably an abjected figure and the text, in the case of Santos, has simply moved with her into the attic, or more accurately, into the asylum. It is an important change, for now we hear and see from the madwoman's perspective, but whether it is truly a liberated position is open to question.

The Autogenographic Fiction of Emma Santos

Previously described as 'une grande écrivain Emma Santos, trop ignorée' (le Garrec 1976), she has become a relatively marginal writer, but *La Malcastrée* in particular achieved some considerable critical and commercial success in the 1970s, and continues to be read and taught on feminist writing courses at universities around the world.[5] To use Foucault's term,

[4] This raises the spectre of the potentially ghettoising effect of the label 'women's writing', which while it offers a space for expression, may also be reduced to another excluded space if it becomes marginalised by its gendered label.

[5] A certain modest revival appears to be underway. A theatre performance of a collage of her work was staged in February 2012 by Monica Mojica at Le Colombier theatre in Paris, and a number of academics in three countries are currently working on her writing, resulting so far in three chapters appearing in Ni Cheallaigh et al, *Quand la folie parle* (2014).

the author-function 'Emma Santos' is itself a fiction, and the chiasmic reciprocity of the relationship between life and writing is here the most pronounced and inextricable of all three authors in this study. The author, whose real name is Marie-Annick Le Goff, wrote a series of novels under the pseudonym Emma Santos, featuring a narrator-protagonist named Emma, thus apparently establishing an autobiographical, or autofictional, link between the author and the texts.[6] This link is at least partially fictive and unreliable, and although there is considerable material drawn from the author's life, there is also a considerable degree of rewriting, to the extent that the texts became themselves centrally implicated in the author's ongoing renegotiation of identity. She was compulsively interrogating her identity in the process of reformulating herself. The corpus therefore displays an autogenographic process that at the same time constructs and deconstructs identity. Ultimately, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that her writing represents autogenographic failure, as Le Goff became trapped in the fictionalised identity of her own creation that she later desperately tried to break out of, a point to which I return when I discuss the texts of her middle period.

The details of Emma Santos's life have long been obscure.[7] Such biographical notes as currently exist in print are largely culled from the texts, which are often misleading and inconsistent, resulting in many contradictions between the sources, even as to her year of birth.[8] Her publishers, *des femmes*, under the direction of the late Antoinette Fouque, were very circumspect about divulging any information whatsoever about the author. My research has confirmed some basic facts through direct contact with the Le Goff family.[9] Santos was born Marie-Annick Le Goff, on 16th July, 1943, in Paris to a family of modest means. She took her own life forty years later in her apartment in February 1983, and I will address the circumstances surrounding her death in the final section of the chapter. The third daughter of a family that would eventually number eight children, she grew up in Paris, although she spent

[6] The pseudonym combines an ironic Flaubertian reference to Emma Bovary, the author's own first-name initials and in the surname, ironic allusions to the saintly and therefore to martyrdom, which take on greater significance in the context of the corpus' thematic content.

[7] In this chapter I use the name Emma Santos, as this is the name all nine texts are published under, albeit acknowledging how this posthumously perpetuates the extent to which Le Goff's authorial veil conceals the real woman. Hopefully, in bringing to light some facts of her life and the dialectic between her life and her texts, my analysis will also go some way to providing an alternative unveiling of Le Goff.

[8] For example, Pagès in Makward and Cottenet-Hage (1996) puts the year at 1946. Santos's texts are contradictory and fuel this disruption of 'fact', despite the pretention to drawing on autobiography.

[9] The biographical information contained here is drawn from an interview conducted in person with three sisters of Santos: Armelle, Marie-Françoise and Joëlle Le Goff in Paris, 23rd March 2012. Quotations from this interview are cited as 'Le Goff 2012'. I include a certain amount of detail in order to rectify errors about the author resulting from excessive reading of her texts for biography.

some time in her grandmother's home in Brittany to escape the war. Her mother was a housewife with artistic talents and her father, described as intelligent and 'très bohème' by his daughters, had to give up his studies because of the war and ended up doing a variety of jobs including some teaching and accounting. Although not wealthy, Armelle Le Goff states, 'chez nous on avait des livres. On n'avait pas beaucoup d'argent mais on lisait' (Le Goff 2012), and Santos's writing displays a very high level of autodidactic erudition, with much literary and cultural intertextuality.

We should resist the temptation to read the texts as simply autobiographical, and these texts and the madness therein should be read metaphorically – while not severing the link between author and text. Understanding the facts of Santos' life is important for what it reveals about the many points where the texts diverge from the author's life, thereby exposing the creative and symbolic sophistication of her writing. Having a more accurate biographical context here enables us to recognise how quickly readers and critics reduce women-authored texts to the personal life of the writing woman, and thereby fail to take sufficient account of the creative richness and universality of those texts. Her family confirms that Santos was involved in a car accident aged eleven in which she had 'la gorge coupée' and came within millimetres of being killed, as is described in the corpus. On the way to school the car she was travelling in was crashed into by another car, throwing Santos through the windscreen and leaving shards of glass lodged in her throat. Her sister Armelle believes that Santos was not well cared for by the attending doctors, who failed to remove all the glass, and she had to be operated on again later. She suffered life-long physical health problems, specifically thyroid problems, as a result of the accident and operations. She was also left with a very visible scar high on her neck which was 'très dur à supporter' (Le Goff 2012). Her sisters believe that she never fully recovered from this accident and that this underlay many of her psychological problems.

Despite her poor health, Santos did well at school and her intelligence won her entry to the École Normale Supérieure, where she qualified to teach. According to her sisters, Santos dreamed of being a teacher from a young age, and loved the career she held for ten years. She was forced to give up her beloved profession as a result of the thyroid problems that made her fatigued and weak. Santos experienced psychological problems, suffering bouts of depression, and she was hospitalised several times. Armelle Le Goff does not believe she was interned for extended periods, and observes that because of her own treatment she would

have witnessed much of the way women were treated and dealt with in the psychiatric system, material which dominates the corpus. Santos was relatively discreet about her treatment with her family, but she did confide about the doctors who treated her, and her apparently decreasing levels of confidence as her contact with the medical profession continued. Santos' sisters refute the assignation of *folle* for their sister, while accepting that she had physical and psychological problems, and Armelle insists that, 'Elle n'était pas folle. Du tout', and Joëlle agrees 'Ah non, elle n'était pas folle' (Le Goff 2012).

Santos did have a very unhappy relationship with a much older man that began when she was still young and ended badly around ten years later; her sisters describe this break-up as traumatic and brutal. This companion appears to have mistreated Santos, the split left her emotionally scarred, and this remains a sensitive subject for her family even now. Her sisters were unable to confirm whether Santos ever had an abortion, a theme given great significance in the texts. At the time of her death, Santos's work was being refused for publication and she was consequently in very low spirits, a point which will be developed later in this chapter. During our conversation, her sisters were visibly clutching for justifications and qualifications for her suicide, positing that although she had taken sleeping tablets it was not clear how many, and avoiding the terms 'overdose' or 'suicide', interjecting that she was 'très fatiguée'. This sororal wish to smooth over the self-destruction is understandable, but must be respectfully recognised as such. The family is a valuable source of background, but one that is limited as they do not hold medical records for Santos and have little information about other aspects of the author's life and illness, and there are numerous obvious lacunae inviting further archival and practical research.

Santos was heavily engaged in art before she turned to writing, and her initial experimentation with artistic expression took the form of painting, seen as a highly semiotic art form by Kristeva, drawing as it does on an emotional register beyond words.[10] Santos's drawings, sketches and paintings can be seen as a semiotic expression of her feminist protest prefiguring the content and thematics of her writing.[11] She produced many drawings in a mainly fauvist, surrealist style using bold primary colours and hyperbolic figures, which she

[10] See Lechte (1990) for an elaboration of Kristeva's theory of the semiotic as it relates to colour and the visual arts.

[11] See Appendix I for a selection of drawings taken from *J'ai tué Emma S...* and *Écris et tais-toi*. A number of her paintings and drawings are held at the Musée de L'Art Brut in Lausanne; some are also held by *des femmes* publishing house, and the remainder are in the possession of Armelle Le Goff, who acts as informal caretaker for Santos' archive.

called 'poupées phantasmes' (Le Goff 2012). These fantasmic *poupées* display a recurring motif of pregnancy, with numerous images of a foetus in a woman's womb, or tiny foetuses or infant children emerging from the woman's mouth, producing the *enfant-langage* she attempts to articulate in her writing. In one painting, used as the cover for *Écris et tais-toi*, the woman's head is shrunk to the extent she becomes almost *acéphale,* a motif that recurs in Linda Lê's corpus. The sexual and maternal organs, the breasts and womb, are enlarged and foregrounded. This can be seen as a satire on society's denigration of women's intellectual and culturally-creative capacities in favour of their reduction to their biological and maternal reproductive role. It can also be seen as a visual metaphor for the externally frustrated attempt to speak (*tais-toi*) and for the centrality of the maternal in Santos's *écriture*, in which linguistic production and biological reproduction are mutual metaphors.

Santos began writing in the late 1960s, and her corpus reflects themes common to *écriture féminine,* which experienced its heyday in the post-68 moment of feminist revolution lasting well into the late 1970s, and of which Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva are seen as something of a Holy Trinity of intellectual figures. French feminism, and its various articulations of bodily writing, feminine writing, and *parler femme* or speaking of (and from) the specificity of women's embodied experience, celebrates the feminine and the maternal, ideologically valorized and employed in a radical rejection of phallogocentrism, in a poetics of lyrical and ludic illogic. Of these, Kristeva's semiotic politics as articulated in *La Révolution du langage poétique* produces one of the most comprehensively articulated feminist reworkings of psychoanalytic and linguistic theories. Written in 1974, Kristeva's theory emerged at the same historical moment as Santos's poetic fiction narratives, and provides a generically alternative discourse expressing a similar desire for linguistic, social and cultural revolution (in short a new Symbolic order), out of a sense of anger and frustration. It is thus particularly illuminating to put these two discourses – one fictional, the other theoretical – in dialogue, and to use Kristeva's theory of the semiotic to read Santos, while also using Santos as a way to identify potential limits to Kristeva's theoretical framework.

Santos is still often associated with the French feminist project, but her links with the M.L.F. were ambivalent, and she wrote of her reluctance to, '[s]'enfermer dans le ghetto féminin [...] Tant pis pour le M.L.F. Des hommes, j'ai reçu l'amour. Des hommes, j'ai reçu l'amitié. Je ne me suis jamais sentie si seule que dans une société de femmes' (ETT 113-4).

The position of her writing in relation to French feminism must be probed a little. Born out of the ironic reappropriation of psychoanalytic (in particular Lacanian) discourse on the woman's body, the movement was concerned in particular with the figure of the hysteric (Polverel 2014, 100). Hélène Cixous and Cathérine Clément, in *La Jeune Née* (1975), attempt to rethink the misogyny inherent in the trope. Cixous writes in 'Le Sexe ou la tête' (1976) that, in a way, women have had no choice but to be decapitated, literally or figuratively, and reduced to an *acéphale* silence. It is against this silence Cixous writes, affirming a difference that asserts itself no longer as 'une sorte de veille funèbre, ni de mise en scène fantasmatique de la décapitation de la femme, mais [...] des lieux d'identifications du moi qui ne soient plus aliénés à l'image proposée par le masculin' (ibid.)

Cixous argues that women's writing, to the extent that it is a writing of hysteric pain, serves to reinforce patriarchy's conception and treatment of women, not challenge it, therefore reinforcing the disempowering image of the hysteric female figure. In other words, repeating a discourse of victimhood. Polverel accepts that Santos's position in relation to the Cixousian project is necessarily ambivalent, 'car d'une certaine manière cette figure hystérique que dénonce Hélène Cixous, Emma Santos l'incarne malgré elle', and that despite the innovative force of her writing, Santos also represents 'la figure de la femme dominée' (2014, 100).[12] This is what allows Françoise Tilkin to conclude that, 'L'image de la femme folle n'est pas l'élément séducteur qu'espérait peut-être une littérature féministe qui voit en Sylvia Plath ou en Emma Santos le type achevé de la femme opprimée' (1990, 77). To an extent, this is one of the conclusions I come to in this chapter. However, the situation is far more nuanced, and what Cixous and Tilkin arguably do is to repeat the mistakes of misogynistic patriarchal culture, by overlooking the specificities of the hysteric's situation producing madness, and dismissing or failing adequately to take account of the discourse of the madwoman. I would counter the emphasis of the characterisations 'figure de la femme dominée' and 'femme opprimée' above as focusing on the victim(hood) and would argue rather that to a certain extent at least, Santos's narrator is the figure of the woman betrayed, and failed, by the systems of language, medicine and publishing.[13]

[12] Polverel herself concludes further on that due to the metaphoric quality, the irony and ludic tone employed, and the innovative singularity of her writing, Santos cannot be seen as 'un fantasme de décapitation' in Cixous' terms (2014, 105).

[13] Six of Santos's nine texts were published by Antoinette Fouque's *des femmes* publishing house, established in 1974 by the Psych et Po group as the material support for this revolutionary cultural movement, but here too the

Santos writes *from* madness, in the sense of a subjective, personal understanding of the experience of women's madness, as she was an author who experienced mental illness and various forms of psychiatric treatment over ten years. She says in an interview in 1976, 'Je suis entrée par erreur dans le système psychiatrique, parce que je souffrais de la thyroïde et que l'on a mis les troubles psychiques causés par une maladie organique sur le compte de la folie' (le Garrec 1976). She describes in the same interview having been advised that in order to sign off work sick on *congé médicale* (because of her thyroid illness), it would be easier to do so as a psychiatric patient, and this is ostensibly how she entered *le système de la folie*. Once designated by society as *folle*, she assumes this position as one from which to resist the society operating the interpellation, and move from disempowerment to empowerment, even triumphalism, 'Dans *La Malcastré* (sic) j'avais subis puis écrit. Pour *La Loméchuse* l'humiliation de la folie plus jamais. La folie triomphante, j'étais «la reine de la folie»' (LL 9-10), and 'Elle part elle rit, elle décide de vivre sa folie' (ibid., 131). Santos exploited the discourse and (il)logic of madness, harnessing them to her feminist protest, and allowed her writing to be seduced and shaped by the rejection of order and logic. Her narratives are not realist narratives describing her own madness and treatment, but are explicitly situated 'entre le témoignage et le phantasme' (LL 9), containing elements of delirium, the oneiric and the fantastical, and subtended by a deeply satirical and ironic tone. There is a need to bear witness and hold to account, to express the vicissitudes of fear, anger and deep frustration of the woman within the psychiatric system, 'les psychiatres et leur système inventé contre elle' (LI 16), which becomes a metaphor for the system of language, the Symbolic. There is also the desire to exploit creatively the position she inhabits in order to challenge, to resist and to reformulate the terms of the relationship. Ultimately, Santos' mad empowerment appears to fail, bringing her narrator back time and again to the confines of the asylum, regardless of how ostensibly voluntary she at times depicts this return to be.

The Santosian project exploits and ironises core concepts and motifs of psychoanalysis such as castration, the mirror stage, the oedipal complex and the construction of the subject in language, in order to articulate protest, and thereby as patient she appropriates the discourse of the Master. Her corpus emerges not only from feminist discourse, but also from the counter-discourse of the anti-psychiatry movement of the late-twentieth century led by R.D.

---

author-publisher relationship was troubled, and on an extra-diegetic level Santos again offers a correcting perspective to the feminist history of the period, which I will discuss again later in this chapter.

Laing and Thomas Szasz, critics from within the profession itself.[14] Among these was the senior French psychiatrist Roger Gentis, who encountered Santos and encouraged her desire to write and publish.[15] In the preface to the 1973 Maspéro edition of *La Malcastrée*, he decries the 'esprit sérieux' of scientific discourse proclaiming itself as mono-logic truth and unquestionable fact, and celebrates the insight offered by the canon of so-called mad male writers such as Nerval, Hölderlin and Jarry:

> La folie, elle a heureusement continué à parler, à voix de plus en plus haute, et malgré le caquetage assourdissant des psychiatres, dans la production littéraire, poétique et romanesque de ces deux derniers siècles [...] Il faut surtout interroger la folie elle-même. Assez de discours sur la folie. Branchons-nous plutôt sur celle qui se dit, qui s'écrit en personne – en première personne. (LMal, 1973, 9-10)[16]

This implicitly recognizes that if we interrogate madness through writers, we must incontrovertibly interrogate female madness through female writers, and Gentis places Santos alongside those writers who he believed anyone seeking to understand madness ought to read, *'"Avez-vous lu Nerval? Avez-vous lu Artaud?", dites maintenant: "Avez-vous lu Unica Zürn, avez-vous lu Emma Santos?"'* (ibid., 11; original italics). The apparent madness of the texts and of the language, therefore, should be used neither to dismiss these texts as the ravings of a madwoman, nor to denigrate the literary quality and sophistication thereof. One reviewer, viciously critical of Santos's work, showed a disappointing failure to understand the synthesis of life and literature involved: 'En fait, elle triche sur la folie, et c'est insupportable. Elle n'avait qu'à s'emmener simplement, Emma Santos, et sans se prendre pour Antonin Artaud' (Caster 1976). To dismiss Santos's texts as mad nonsense or faked madness is, again, to reproduce the misogyny inherent in the discourse surrounding women's madness. Nonetheless, the temptation to do this is one of the inherent and fundamental paradoxes of

[14] See for example Thomas S. Szasz, *Ideology and Insanity* (1973) and R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (1960) for the core ideas of this attempt from within psychiatry to rethink conventional ideas on madness.

[15] When they met in 1971, Santos had already published her first text, *L'Illulogicenne*, and it is therefore erroneous to attribute to Gentis credit for intiating her writing project.

[16] We cannot ignore the irony of this preface, as the psychiatrist yet again has his say before the woman patient and writer, as well as the sense of the authority this endeavours to lend her writing. Santos herself reacted critically later. In the preface to *La Loméchuse* she writes, 'Même les anti-psychiatres, anti-anti, ultra-psychiatres veulent garder le privilège de la parole de la folie, et préfèrent taire mots et maux du psychiatrisé par une bonne dose d'Halopéridol' (LL 9).

the trope of the madwoman in writing by women, and it is important to recognise that this is a significant limitation to the trope's otherwise powerful potential for protest.

Mad Revolution: *Un cri écrit* in the Early Trilogy

Santos's first three texts, *L'lllulogiciennce* (1971), *La Malcastrée* (1973) and *La Loméchuse* (1974) are dominated by several key events experienced by the central female narrator-protagonist, Emma, who alternates between *je* and *elle* as the subject and object of narration.[17] The triptych compulsively describes the narrator's experience of recurring mental illness and psychiatric internment and a range of treatments including electro-shock therapy, medication with psychotropic drugs, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and voluntary out-patient counselling. Scattered through the texts are sparse and at times almost casual references to a traumatic car accident suffered age ten or twelve, depending on the text, in which glass from a car windscreen severs the narrator's neck, almost fatally guillotining her. All three texts portray a turbulent and unhappy ten-year-long relationship with a Portuguese man, referred to generally as 'l'homme' or 'l'Homme', who repeatedly rejects and ultimately leaves her. Several involuntary abortions feature prominently here and include an account of an illegal backstreet abortion the narrator is forced into by her boyfriend, which contrasts with a legal therapeutic abortion imposed on the narrator by the medical profession.

Santos' compulsive repetition of these traumatic events invites a reading in terms of the growing field of trauma studies and scriptotherapy led by Cathy Caruth and Kathryn Robson, and this would be a viable hermeneutic approach.[18] However, while writing offered Santos a way to survive and mediate her suffering, the protest of her project extends beyond a personal attempt at self-healing through writing to a more universalised metaphor for the desire for feminist revolution, and in fact the attempt to write that revolution; for this reason Kristevan theory is more relevant to this discussion. I read these traumas metaphorically, not for biographical tragedy, rather for what the author carries from them into her writing. Nonetheless, I also retain the link between the politics of these texts and the situation of their author, to the extent that it is relevant and instructive. I will focus here on the metaphoric

[17] This narrator, Emma, may be seen as the same character throughout this trilogy.
[18] Caruth (1995) and Robson (2004) offer expansive articulations of the core concepts of the contemporary fields of trauma studies and scriptotherapy.

symbolism of the themes of castration, the liminal locus of the asylum as linguistic womb, the maternal and the abortion of maternity, and the theme of martyrdom and suicide as self-sacrifice.

Kristeva places great emphasis on style and the poetic use of language, and it is important to consider early on the style of Santos' *cri écrit*. Beauvoir recognises with this phrase the combination in this writing of the orality of physical *parole* and the written *langue* in an excessive, transgressive textual practice that insists on being heard, and seeks to speak the semiotic into the Symbolic. This bodily cry written into language becomes an exploration of the self which renders the narrator a Kristevan *sujet-en-procès* taking her to the limits of subjectivity and language, to a liminal point. This early asylum trilogy displays a flamboyant use of poeticism, lyricism and an *écriture* revelling in its *folie*, and the reader is invited to step with the author outside the logos. Madness for Santos is analogous to childhood, which represents externality to full assimilation within the socio-Symbolic, 'Être fou, c'est préserver l'enfance, c'est vivre l'imaginaire' (LMal 45), and childhood is a privileged state, one constantly desired, retreated to, valorized and re-enacted.[19] This mad *enfance* is inscribed stylistically, and Santosian discourse aligns 'the first echolalias of infants' and the 'glossalalias in psychotic discourse' that Kristeva identifies as expressions of the semiotic modality (1980a, 135): 'J'ai trouvé le langage de l'enfance. J'ai retrouvé la déraison, la dérision. Un langage tout blanc' (LMal 123).[20] This is pushed to an extreme at times, for example in the semiotic babble celebrated at the close of *La Malcastrée*, 'je donne ma langue au chat. Pouce cassé, chat percé. Broum, Braoum, Vraoum, Brouang, Vrang, Vloumb, Vroub, Beuhh, Bu, Bu, Bu' (124), where Symbolic thesis, or signification, has collapsed, but semiotic *signifiance* persists through some sort of affective onomatopoeia, though at an absolute limit of intelligibility.

The language throughout the triptych is marked by grammatical and syntactical transgression, as well as by extremes of excess and insufficiency: excess in hyperbole, repetition (mostly anaphoric), enumeration and accumulation; insufficiency in ellipses, gaps and syntactic incompletion in which the semiotic irrupts into the Symbolic, breaking into

[19] References to a regression to childhood appear frequently in *La Malcastrée* (in particular LMal 52; 60; 68; 72; 73; 82; 84; 111; 112).

[20] An echolalia is the repetition of speech by a child learning to talk or the meaningless repetition of another's spoken words in psychiatric disorder; glossalalia is unintelligible utterances approximating words and speech, often used in relation to religious speaking in tongues: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/echolalia?searchDictCode=all and http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/599257/glossolalia respectively.

language with a disruptive silence. Santos exploits asyntactic playfulness to install madness into her writing. In *L'Illulogicienne*, prose syntax recedes at moments when the sentence is broken up typographically like a poem, 'Pour faire des enfants/ il faut simplement/ un cygne blanc/ et un étang' (LI 45) and this technique is used repeatedly in that text. Repetition and ludic poeticism at times unite to underscore the text's voluntary madness, 'Je m'affole. Je suis une fille à prendre, une folle à reprendre' (LMal 81), and here the female gender and the madness of the narrator are paralleled through the zeugmatic construction. Language is severely fragmented, mirroring the disarticulation of the subject, which is staged physically and psychologically, in a technique we encounter again in Linda Lê's *Voix*.

La Malcastrée is the most poetic and linguistically radical of Santos' corpus, and also her most successful text both critically and commercially. The language here is fluid, rhythmic and rhyming. We physically feel the beat of the language, and even reading silently the rhythm imposes itself on the reader's consciousness in lines such as, 'Les enfants aux enfances heureuses étaient gênants' (LMal 16) and 'le grain de mon sein devenait dur sous sa main' (LMal 17), combining rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and assonance. The phonetic and physical impression or trace left by the words is at least as important as the sense they convey. At times whole paragraphs resemble poems, as with the long passage evoking the mechanistic dehumanisation of the psychiatric system: 'On glissait sur les tapis. On posait des questions aux malades. On répondait par un signe de tête. Les machines clignotaient, crépitaient, grésillaient, enregistraient [...] On était des gens dans le nouveau monde' (LMal 22). The anaphora of the mechanical and impersonal 'on' repeated fourteen times in fifteen lines stresses the indifference of the medical profession in general. Anaphora is ubiquitous, and reinforces the sense of insistent emotional excess, for example across two pages the phrase 'Qu'ils' appears seventeen times and 'ça' is repeated twelve times (LI 21-2).

Excess is not only marked stylistically, but also in hyperbolic metaphors used to warp reality, for example in the scene where a violent attack by the narrator on her lover's room is expanded to be equated with the destruction of the whole world (LI 26). At the extreme of semiotic writing, language becomes deafening excess, and the narrator insists, 'Mon hurlement efface tout' (LM 48). The result is that the text may both fascinate and repel, in a manner akin to Santos' paintings, and at times the text may feel rebarbative, and the reader may be tempted to put it down, resulting in the failure of communication. The intensity of emotion and the lyricism carry the reader along, but we are left with the sense that the author

can envisage no compromise, as François Bott observes: 'il faut écouter son cri, ou fermer son livre et la reconduire au silence. Le cri ou le silence, dit Emma Santos, elle-même' (Bott 1973). In *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Kristeva posits a heterogenous signifying practice she terms *signifiance* which is unlimited, unbounded and an operation of the drives towards, in, and through language: 'Ce procès hétérogène, ni fond morcelé anarchique, ni blocage schizophrène, est une pratique de structuration et de déstructuration, passage à la limite subjective et sociale, et – à cette condition seulement – il est jouissance et révolution' (RLP 15). This, I argue, is what is in play in the texts of Emma Santos, which oscillate between revolution and the jouissance of death.

That there is a desire for revolution, that this has a sense of collective feminist politics, and that this is being attempted through language, is evident, 'Nous emploierons les mots pour tout, nous détruirons tout avec les mots [...] Nous briserons les voitures avec les mots, les asiles avec les mots. Les mots peuvent tout, des mots vivants' (LMal 43-4). The insistent use of the collective first-person plural 'nous' here as elsewhere in the trilogy, underscores the political, collective ambition of the sentiment, despite statements Santos made subsequently distancing herself from a collective politics, which I shall discuss later. The optimistic faith in the potential for language to be mobilised to change language, 'Les mots peuvent tout', is contradicted by a recognition of the double bind, 'On écrira notre livre, nous, quand on aura trouvé un système différent, un autre système que les mots. Mais on n'a que ça, leur mots' (LMal 14-15).[21] Going back to the former quotation, it reads, 'Les mots peuvent tout, *des mots vivants*', and what Santos is attempting to conceive is a transformation of language, 'nous, on a cherché le langage du corps' (ibid., 15). This imagines a new language inflected with the pulsions of life and articulated with the bodily breath of vital energy, not an ossified language of univocal fixity and thetic rigidity:

> Nous inventerons un truc étrange qu'ils appellent bêtement sentiment. Des mots, des mots, des mots, bien sûr. Nous ne pourrions pas trouver autre chose, des mots toujours. Un sentiment, ça ressemble à l'enfance, ça tient chaud au ventre [...] Nous réinventerons le langage. (LMal 43)

[21] Allen Thiher makes the point that Santos highlights the problem of the double bind, and rightly suggests that suicide and madness as 'the antisystem she opposes to language' offer two alternative responses for Santos (1999, 311). The possessive 'leur' here echoes Beauvoir's (mis)conception of language somehow belonging to men.

Kristeva's poetic revolution offers a way out of the double bind in a similar vision of language that reconciles and balances more respectfully the necessary mutuality she identifies between the semiotic and Symbolic terms of signifying practice. However, it must be recognised that in her attempt to write her way both out of and back into (a new) language, Santos' textual practice remains enmeshed in this double bind to a great extent through much of her corpus, until, as I shall argue, her final work.

Santos's writing straddles the border between madness and normality and her female narrator vacillates between the *dedans* and *dehors* of the asylum and society, but is out of place in both, and which is 'inside' and which 'outside' is rendered unstable. If the attic was a liminal locus in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* – within the building but also a space of exclusion and marginalisation, a social *bagne* – the asylum similarly is a marginalized space of exile outside society that is nonetheless still within the patriarchal structures of social authority and control. As Foucault observes of the position of the *fou* since the Renaissance, 'il est mis à l'intérieur de l'extérieur, et inversement. Position hautement symbolique, qui restera sans doute la sienne jusqu'à nos jours' (1972, 26). This liminal symbolic position becomes the site of protest for the woman writer, Santos, who opens a mad dialogue of dissidence with the social outside. This limen, a threshold state characterized by ambiguity, indeterminacy and openness, is reflected both in the dissolution of identity and subjectivity, and the disorientating physical movement of the narrator. This is foregrounded in the epigraph to *La Malcastrée*, which presents two female patients caught between *dehors* and *dedans*. Having escaped the locus of madness in order to refind some social and linguistic existence – 'Nous avons fui l'asile et le silence' – they experience fear, 'Nous avons eu peur. Nous n'étions pas habituées' and consequently, 'nous voulions retourner dedans...' (LMal, epigraph). This fear, which is a sustained emotion throughout the corpus, is in a way the converse of that felt by Beauvoir's female protagonists in *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*: there the madwoman's fear was of embracing madness and contemplating semiotic revolt or even revolution, whereas here the next generation of madwomen are fearful of leaving their semiotic refuge and attempting to reintegrate once more into the Symbolic. The two options presented to Santos's pair of madwomen in this epigraph are either suicide, which is performed by one, who throws herself under a train, or the option chosen by the narrator,

'Moi, j'ai continué. J'ai cherché des mots. Un mot pas encore inventé...' (ibid.). In this way female sacrifice is performed as a means to open the text.

The oscillating *va et vient* established in this preface subtends the trilogy. When in the asylum the narrator dreams of escape, but when she is supposedly free outside (and back 'in' society) she feels alienated, 'Dehors libre elle est prisonnière' (LL 139). She is fearful and pines to return within, realizing she has lived too long in the dark to survive in the daylight. She states, 'Je vis entre l'angoisse d'être dehors et le désir de retourner dedans. Je me balance [...] Une petite fille. Dehors, dedans, dehors, dedans. Je joue à la marelle. Dehors [...] je suis sur le rebord, entre vie-mort' (LMal 54). A sense of physical, psychic and linguistic liminality persists as the narrator finds herself variously in an airport, a basement car-park and a train station where it is 'une heure entre deux heures. Un trou' (LMal 51). None of these is a destination, as they are all nowhere-points of waiting on the way elsewhere. Within the asylum she is often represented in corridors, or when in a particular room, it is a bare, dis-located whiteness. Although she identifies the famous Parisian psychiatric hospital, Sainte-Anne, it is bleached into atopia, 'elle se décomposera dans la solitude blanche de l'hôpital. Sainte-Anne, on a parlé d'un *non-lieu*' (LL 148; my emphasis).

This *non-lieu* is a maze where the narrator loses her self, 'Je suis dans le labyrinthe. Je me perds, je crie. Perdue, hurle' (LMal 65) and the narrative takes the reader also on this disorienting labyrinthine *errance*.[22] Liminality is reflected in the instability of subjectivity as the *je/elle* subject/object position interchanges frequently without warning. Santos exposes the relationship between the writing and written self and the process of linguistic construction of the self involved here and on the wider socio-cultural level. She writes at the close of *La Loméchuse*, 'L'auteur est enfin pris en charge par le service psychiatrique. Le JE écrivant devient ELLE écrit. Instant privilégié où l'écriture et la vie se confondent dans le silence' (LL 154), as the subject writing language is reduced once more to the written object, yet in the slippage can detect the privileged moment of opportunity for rewriting the self.

This moment of alienation of the self into the linguistic subject is the moment of castration, and castration is a crucial *leitmotif.* In psychoanalytic terms, the creation of the speaking subject necessitates castration, and this is important here, not least because it forms the ideological backbone of *La Malcastrée*, as the title itself indicates. The title foregrounds the

[22] *Errance* is an alternative mode of this positional liminality, and she writes, for example, 'J'ai traîné sans but. Sans raison' (LI 139), and the latter phrase puns on the dual state of being directionless and mad.

narrator's status as 'malcastrée', a subject whose separation and establishment as a speaking subject is incomplete or a failure. Santos posits a narrator who explicitly does not possess a solid positionality, as her castration is botched and traumatic. The car accident which metaphorically performs this failed castration, variously occurring at age ten or twelve in the texts, occurs when the narrator is on the verge of adolescence and puberty.[23] This is a crucial stage for the female, one which Freud viewed as a sort of second oedipal in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905). Kristeva also implies a form of second mirror stage at puberty (1974, 49), and we understand that Santos's narrator in this trilogy is stuck in a perpetual mirror-stage of self-creation in writing. It is not a matter simply of Santos writing from the semiotic, it is rather that her *écriture* is suspended in the liminal point, the thetic phase of rupture at the point of castration *between* the semiotic and Symbolic signification. It is caught between the cry and the writing. For the narrator, this oedipal stage and the castration required to emerge into the sexualised, socialised 'womanhood' desired for her by the socio-Symbolic she is about to become subject of, and subject to, are botched. Writing then becomes an obsessively-held mirror with which to attempt the self-(re)creation required for personhood, although this attempt appears repeatedly to fail, perhaps because the author cannot achieve equilibrium between the two modalities of the signifying process. The semiotic crisis needs to be transcended.

For Santos' Kristevan-style semiotic revolution to be achieved there must be some reconciliation of the thetic and semiotic, and a new disposition can only be articulated when the Symbolic does not excessively repress the semiotic:

> seul le sujet pour qui le thétique n'est pas un refoulement de la *chora* sémiotique mais une position assumée ou subie, peut mettre en cause le thétique pour qu'une nouvelle disposition s'articule. Il faut que la castration ait été un problème, un trauma, un drame, pour qu'à travers la position symbolique qu'elle cause, le sémiotique puisse faire retour. (Kristeva 1974, 49)

[23] In the author's preface to *La Loméchuse* she describes an accident at age ten, 'gorge tranchée à l'âge de dix ans' (9) whereas the later *La Punition d'Arles* refers to a car accident aged twelve (PA 53; 87). Nathalie Ségeral also makes this connection highlighting the significance of the coincidence of this trauma with the moment of accession to sexuality, underlining the links between the oral/linguistic and the sexual (womanhood) (2014, 133).

Santos re-stages a traumatic castration in her attempt to restore the semiotic to the Symbolic. However, her narrator is repeatedly subjected to a constant repression of the semiotic *chora*, thus foreclosing her revolutionary efforts to articulate a new disposition.

Before examining the Symbolic repression of semiotic madness frustrating revolution, it is important to consider in detail the representation of the attempts at *bonne castration* and linguistic rebirth in the trilogy. The liminal locus of the asylum offers a pre-oedipal space of Imaginary possibility, a linguistic womb where the female self (and a female or feminine language) may be disarticulated in order to be re-articulated, or decomposed to be re-composed in her own terms. From the start the asylum is linked to writing, and Santos opens her writing project, her first text, *L'Illulogicienne*, thus: 'Une fille folle nue écrit dans une chambre nue. Une chambre d'hôpital comme partout. Une chambre blanche. Sans rien. Un lit c'est tout. Une chambre nulle part' (LI 7)'.[24] The room's anti-sceptic whiteness, empty but for a bed, recalls the medicalized circumstances of modern birth, and the chiasmic metaphor of biological birth for linguistic production persists throughout the corpus. The narrator is a borderless self, 'sans contours' (LMal 66), a 'moi en miettes' (LMal 63), yet expressing a constantantly frustrated desire for subjectivity: 'J'ai besoin d'être définie, finie. Je suis une masse, plutôt liquide [...] Je suis un tas effondré, tout sauf une femme' (LMal 66).

The narratives' female subject, previously defined in relation to a male or by her maternal function, does not have a model with which to redefine herself in the absence of these borders, 'J'étais femme aimée, définie par un homme et un enfant. L'homme est parti. L'enfant est mort [...] Je suis devenue femmoïde informe. Sans contour [...] Un faux semblant de femme [...] Liquide incolore' (LI 136) A sense of despair is stressed by a syntax mimicking poetry as she continues, 'Je n'existe plus./ Je n'ai jamais existé./ Je n'existerai jamais' (LI 137), despairing of the possibility for female subjectivity beyond marriage and motherhood, and apparently echoing Lacan's notorious aphorism in *Encore*, 'Il n'y a pas ~~la~~ Femme' (1975, 93).[25] It is a return to the Lacanian mirror-stage, and through writing the narrator, like the author, will try to rewrite herself, 'Je rêve de me regarder dans une glace [...] Je me regarde dans l'écriture' (LMal 96). However just like her own language, all the mirrors are broken in this 'maison-miroir. J'ai cassé toutes les glaces' (LMal 66); the reflection is cracked and splintered,

[24] This line is reformulated and repeated throughout the first chapter of this first text. See Elsa Polverel's detailed analysis of the implications of this repetition (2014).

[25] See also Lacan's Ch.VII of *Encore*, 'Une Lettre d'Âmour' (sic) (1975, 99-113) for a full explication of Lacan's theories on the cultural fantasy of 'woman'.

and the narrator appears unwilling or unable to face herself or assume an identity that would allow her to assume subjectivity. By breaking language, the author herself seems to have destroyed the mirror she needs to see her new self.

In Kristeva's conception, the semiotic is marked with a duality as it is both assimilating and destructive, making the semiotised body a place of permanent scission on the border between life and death (RLP 26). We understand that the maternal body is what mediates Symbolic law, and is the ordering principle of the semiotic, which is on the path of destruction, aggression and death (ibid., 26-7). Santos makes her narrator the site of this mediation and the site of the dualistic scission of life and death, birth and self-destruction, in a reiteration of maternity and its involuntary failure. The trilogy is polarised by the extremes of life and death. Maternity, abortion and suicide dominate as the narrator becomes the site of these extremes. The linguistic womb of the asylum has a mirror metaphor in the narrator's womb, and she makes herself the site of maternity with the potential to 'enfanter un nouveau langage' (LMal 43). With this move, Santos unites the maternal and the linguistic, the processes of cultural production and biological (re)production, and undoes the nature/culture binary. The narrator in all three texts is pregnant with this foetal *enfant-langage*. Each text, however, also stages this linguistic maternity's repeated failure, as the narrator is forced to abort this pregnancy, first by her lover, 'l'Homme' who forces her to choose between him and this *enfant* (although he subsequently leaves her anyway), then by doctors who enforce what they call a therapeutic abortion, because of her thyroid illness, and it is in this respect that the forces of Symbolic repression of linguistic revolution are most evident.

The narrator's doctors paternalistically insist that she is incapable of shouldering the responsibilities involved in parenting her *enfant-langage* and they cannot run the risk as 'l'enfant sera anormal' (LMal 112).[26] In parallel with this gynaecological abortion is a linguistic abortion, as her spoken language is silenced and her writing is destroyed. The female doctor tells her, 'Il vaudrait mieux se taire maintenant, la boucler définitivement, vous avez compris, détruire vos cahiers et vos mots. On ne vous demande qu'une chose, le silence. Je m'occupe du reste' (LMal 112), and the motif of *cahiers* being confiscated or destroyed recurs.[27] This abortion is crucially not the narrator's choice – it is not that she cannot reproduce, or produce

[26] Ironically, this is set in the late 1960s or early 1970s when women could not legally choose to have an abortion, which was decriminalised in France in 1975 during Simone Veil's period in the *Ministère de la Santé*.

[27] This motif of the destruction of the self mirrored in the destruction of texts is also recurrent in the writing of Linda Lê.

a new linguistic disposition, it is that she is prevented, by the forces of masculine authority. We realize that the linguistic womb-asylum may also foreclose linguistic potential and may again operate to silence women, becoming once more 'le lieu de la transformation, du tais-toi' (Polverel 2011). Santos writes of this sense of failure, 'Ce n'est pas l'histoire de l'enfant-langage que j'ai fait, mais celle du silence. J'ai accouché de mes milliers de solitudes dans un asile' (LMal 115).

If the woman's writing is destroyed *dedans*, it is also drowned-out *dehors*. Despite insisting optimistically that outside, 'J'écris. On peut écrire dehors, on peut. Tout est possible, on peut. Sors de l'hôpital, quitte l'autre monde sans écriture. Dehors ce n'est pas l'asile, on peut...' (LMal 81), the narrator has already described the disorienting, terrifying cacophony of the urban environment, 'Les choses dehors étouffent ma voix et détruisent le langage' (LMal 77), overwhelming this 'fille dans la rue qui parle toute seule' (LMal 75).[28] This silencing effect of the asylum that persists outside is symbolised in the medical metaphor, 'des morceaux de sparadrap qui se croisent sur mes lèvres' (LMal 76). For the narrator, and for the author also, the risk is of remaining stuck in a position of marginalised irrelevance, 'Les normaux font le normal dehors sans besoin d'elle' (LMal 29-30). This sense of being somehow stuck or trapped in this linguistic womb, in this liminal state of a-subjectivity, was acknowledged by Santos in two interviews in the late-1970s, when she received some media attention for staging and acting in her own play. She would leave the hospital to perform, returning there afterwards. She tells Evelyne le Garrec

> Quand on a connu la vie à l'hôpital, on ne peut pas s'en libérer comme ça. J'aime ce milieu qui est sécurisant. Je me laisse aller à la routine de la vie de l'hôpital. Et puis, m'en libérer, pour quoi faire ? Je n'ai rien à faire dans le monde. Dedans, dehors, ça n'a pas de sens. A l'hôpital, il n'y a pas de quotidien. En sortir serait engager une lutte avec le quotidien. (1976)[29]

The chiasmic relationship between life and literature has blurred, and it is difficult to tell at what point the texts retrospectively describe or prefigure the author's dependence on the asylum. Both author and narrator become lost in the labyrinth and unable to find the

[28] The terrifying cacophony of the outside world for a *folle flâneuse* emerging from confinement is seen earlier in Beauvoir's 'Lisa' story of *Quand prime*, and again in Linda Lê's *Voix*.
[29] See also F.R., 'Ni psychothérapie, ni témoignage, Emma Santos sur scène' (1977, 23).

conditions necessary to escape definitively, and Santos writes, 'Reste, reste, ne sors pas de l'asile petit frère, reste dedans. Sa matrice chaude, si tendre, bonne' (LMal 60). The seductions of the paternalistic refuge of the asylum, and of the a-Symbolic self-exile of semiotic madness, prove fatal to the subject's quest for Symbolic existence and a new language at this point.

I referred above to the Symbolic repression of semiotic revolution, and in Santos's asylum trilogy the forces of repressive Symbolic authority are personified by the medical profession. Her corpus reflects a range of attitudes towards psychiatrists and psychiatry, veering from murderous hostility (echoing perhaps the 'psychiatricide' Michel Foucault was accused of) to recognitions of sincere efforts to help her. These positive moments, though, are exceptions in an overwhelmingly angry and frequently bleak account of what is viewed as a dehumanizing, patriarchal and ineffective system made up of cold professionals who *still* treat the female patient as an object to be silenced and re-educated for normal, ordered society. Santos describes 'des hommes-machines en combinaison plastique blanche. Très rapide, ils se passaient les malades sur une table à comptoir-roulant' (LMal 21), and '[i]ls ont voulu que je m'abhorre quand je m'adorais...que je renonce à mes histoires...Ils voulaient...me rendre coïte...civilisée...inventée...on serait d'accord' (LI 106; original ellipses). The latter highlights the extent to which language is based on agreement, voluntary participation (which may be alternatively coerced, or ideologically imposed) in a shared system requiring consent and mutual participation, in which women have been expected or forced to adhere to a system objectifying and marginalizing them. Madness is the refusal to be 'd'accord'.

Doctors are framed repeatedly as agents of social control, the modern incarnations of priests: 'le médecin est un peu le magicien, le confident de la famille, le nouveau prêtre' (LL 9).[30] God and Freud are paralleled as god-heads of monotheistic systems (LMal 59), doctors are the agents of resocialisation for the transgressive female subject (LMal 70), who 'suffoquait sous leurs bonnes paroles d'hyiène mentale' (LI 16; also 19-21). This doctor-priest performs the rites of purification for women in contemporary society as they undergo this modern martyrdom of mental treatment: 'Au Moyen Age on l'aurait accusée de sorcellerie [...] Dommage on évolue, on ne brûle plus. On interne maintenant, on fait taire sous

[30] This preface also ironically cites Gérard de Nerval discussing efforts by doctors to prevent the use of poetry in the public arena.

médicaments' (LL 148).[31] The response of the objectified woman, who is treated as no more than a package, is to flee into fantasy:

> Ils ne s'occupaient plus de moi. Parlaient-ils de moi après tout... Non, plutôt d'un objet, d'un paquet qu'on avait livré. Mais ce paquet allongé sur un lit. Ce paquet docile. Vide et nu. Mais le paquet déposé de force par des infirmiers. Mais le paquet c'était une femme. Et le paquet, et la femme ont fui. Et la femme n'a pas accepté d'être paquet. La femme avait déjà fui en rêve. (LI 19-20)

The only option the narrator can see to avoid medical normalisation and objectification is to take refuge in delirium.

An important contrast to the male-gendered characterisation of these agents of patriarchal Symbolic authority, these 'ils', is the figure of the female doctor, *la Dame Psychiatre* who appears as the *femme-médécin* in *L'Illulogicienne,* assumes greater importance in *La Malcastrée*, and becomes central in *La Loméchuse*. She is an ambivalent character, both a feminisation of the medical profession and a masculinisation of the feminine. The wife and daughter of doctors, she represents a feminised authority, or the female operating within the masculine system – Symbolic woman – and potentially a source of harmony between semiotic and Symbolic, yet one which ultimately fails. She is soft, yet suited-up. She embraces the narrator, yet administers injections. She represents maternity, she brings the narrator copybooks to write in early on, yet she is also the doctor who enforces the narrator's therapeutic abortion and confiscates and destroys her *cahiers*.

The narrator appears able to approach the *Dame Psychiatre* at their first meeting (in a lift, another liminal locus), 'Parce que sa voix est un peu plus humaine du fond de ses vêtements protecteurs de psychiatre' (LMal 22). The two women are at this point united, 'Nous sommes honteuses et complices l'une près de l'autre, silencieuses' and there is a sense of symbiotic union, 'on se faufile' (LMal 22). The earlier male-female symbiosis of Beauvoir that we shall see again in Linda Lê's work, is here replaced with a female-female dyad. What unites them in particular is their female sexuality and biology, 'nous sommes vivantes, maternité triomphante' (LMal 23). The narrator either experiences or fantasises (it is ambiguous) a

[31] The corpus foregrounds the use of psychotropic medication, including Haloperidol, Largactil and Thyroxine to subdue the female patient.

sexual relationship with this medical alter ego, and the desire for sexual union and for re-union with the maternal figure overlap in Emma's desire for the *Dame Psychiatre*. The latter has been a mother, her body bears the marks of maternity, and the narrator imagines being (re-)born from her, 'J'enfonce deux doigts tachés dedans. J'extirpe l'amour du fond, une main brillante, un enfant. Moi' (LMal 23). This over-determination of homosexual desire and maternity appears fictionally to reproduce Kristevan discourse in *Desire in Language*, in which she describes the moment of giving birth as a moment in which the homosexual facet of motherhood is actualised and 'through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her psychosis, and consequently, more negatory of the social, symbolic bond' (1980a, 239). This homosexual fantasy of a union that is open to madness, amplified in *La Loméchuse*, therefore may be seen to posit an inter-female alliance possessing the semiotic potential for feminist revolution.

However, the woman doctor's maternal, sexual softness becomes obscured by her masculine, medical drag as, post-coitus, she puts back on her suit, high heels and glasses and '[e]lle redevient médicale' (LMal 25). Thus, she reverts to a figure of authority, 'La Dame Psychiatre est entrée au dortoir [...] Sévère et autoritaire. Elle avait oublié ses lèvres douces' (LMal 111), and the Irigarayan double sense of lips, the oral lips of soft speech and the vaginal lips of sexual encounter, are implied. The *Dame Psychiatre could* mother the rebirth of the narrator, but she fails, refuses or is prevented from doing so because of her position in the system. In *La Loméchuse* the lesbian relationship develops to the point that the women live together, and their union occludes their separate identities as they merge to become 'Elisabemma', combining their two names. This figure, 'ma soeur femme continuellement enceinte, porteuse de l'enfant' (LL 116) is opposed to the anonymous collective masculine authority of 'ils'. This antithesis is an obsessive focus of *La Loméchuse*, and for example, the word 'Elisabemma' appears seventeen times on two pages, juxtaposed by twenty-nine iterations of 'ils' (LL 116-7).

As Polverel points out, the two women's union has the potential to produce an *enfant* (2014, 107), symbolizing the idea that if patient and (a feminised) practitioner collaborated in a mutual affective relationship, they might produce a new linguistic disposition: 'Nous nous ouvrirons comme terre trop chaude et délivrerons l'enfant' (LMal 44). Polverel tends to the optimistic in her reading, here as elsewhere, overplaying the sense of fertility the pair represents, just as she smooths over the later separation of the symbiotic pair and the failure

of the fusional feminine union, which is ultimately sterile here. 'Elisabemma' is separated when Elisabeth is recovered by the psychiatric profession. Having briefly shared in Emma's rebellious 'folie triomphante', Elisabeth accedes to therapy, 'Elisabeth guérie, elle est guérie' (LL 124; repeated 132; 142).[32] This 'cure' recuperates Elisabeth to the outside world of ordered society, and in the ethic of the text this is negative, as she is closed off to her rebellious psychosis. Emma refuses this cure, consciously resisting normality and choosing so-called madness, 'elle décide de vivre sa folie' (LL 131), and as the text closes she quasi-voluntarily returns to be interned in the psychiatric hospital even though '[e]lle n'est pas folle' (LL 135). Here the lexical field of anxiety returns, Emma is once again fearful and anguished, and torn between 'L'envie de fuir et le désir de rester' (LL 137). As she bids 'Adieu Elisabeth' repeatedly, Emma states, 'on entre dans le système définitivement' (LL 145). She asks which of the two women was free: the patient heavily medicated in her cell or the punctual doctor in her stiff coat, and the ambiguous observation, 'La maladie mentale était maîtrisée en apparence' (LL 151) might apply equally to either woman.

With the path to renaissance through linguistic rebirth apparently barred by continued Symbolic repression, the only means left open to the narrator appears to be sacrificial suicide. When revolution is frustrated, the jouissance of death remains. In order to achieve a second birth and *la bonne castration*, the narrator appears forced to stage a death – her own. The narrator's attempted suicide is evoked repeatedly in the trilogy's references to twenty-five attempted suicides, and Santos reported the same number of suicide attempts in a newspaper interview (F.R. 1977). Kristeva writes, 'En revenant, *à travers l'évènement mortel*, vers ce qui produit sa coupe…*l'artiste esquisse une sorte de seconde naissance*' (1974, 69; my emphasis). The artistic exploration returning to the point of subjective and linguistic origins may trace a sort of second birth. In her lengthy section entitled 'De la poésie qui n'est pas un meurtre' (1974, 70-83), Kristeva elaborates, and identifies two events in the social order acting as counterparts for the thetic moment instituting the Symbolic: sacrifice and art. The artistic and linguistic events appearing to fail or be suspended in liminality, Santos turns to sacrifice. At times the sense is that the narrator actively desires death, other times it appears as the only alternative, the only way out of a suffocating subjectivity that she can neither fully escape nor adequately reform.

[32] This recalls Beauvoir's character Marguerite's status as cured of the semiotic, as discussed in Chapter One.

Suicide is framed as martyrdom, and the triptych frequently evokes religion and describes the narrator as a martyr to the modern-day religion of psychiatric medicine. In *La Malcastrée* there is a darkly humorous, hyperbolic episode (reiterated in various forms in other texts), in which the narrator as a young girl is chased by villagers who seek to sacrifice her for 'le culte de la propreté', screaming insistently that 'elle sera propre, elle sera purifiée' (LMal 104-6). The victim swears defiantly that she will endeavour to 'porter sans honte le péché original, refuser une deuxième fois le baptème' (ibid.), and concludes, 'je devenais sainte Emma pour le village une malade pour l'officier de police qui me conduisait à l'hôpital pour la première fois' (LMal 106), and we recall the connotations of sainthood in the author's chosen pseudonym. This staging of martyrdom and sacrificial suicide may be seen as a personal expression of defeated despair, a dominance of the death drive outlined controversially by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Alternatively it may be read more politically as a self-imposed martyrdom enabling the instantiation of a new Symbolic, or again as the sacrifice of real women, both literally and symbolically, enacted by a patriarchal Symbolic to guarantee its existence, or indeed as both – in an attempt to renegotiate the terms of that abjecting sacrifice. The narrator, thus combining both the maternal and the mortal, points up the paradox of castration for the female subject, and the unique position the woman is in, being at once the site of separation (the female subject to be separated from) *and* also the subject who must separate from the female – thus the narrator being both the mother and the emerging subject must kill herself in order to give birth to herself. This raises the question of whether abjection or an internalised abjection of the female self is a necessary precondition of female subjectivity, and of women's writing.[33]

Frustration: From *cri écrit* to *Écris et tais-toi*

The five texts following the early trilogy convey above all a deepening sense of frustration and of the failure of the writing project, which lead to narrative intensification. The author employs strategies of insistence in the compulsive repetition of themes, ideas and extensive reworking of previous writing that becomes a fetishised *écriture*. *La Punition d'Arles* (1975),

[33] Marianne Hirsch considers this question in 'Mothers and Daughters' and argues that women's condition is a permanent state of loss, in the loss of mother to daughter and vice versa, or 'the essential female tragedy' (1981, 202). The problem with this view is that it posits women as intrinsically in lack, and potentially also, intrinsically mad, or at least melancholic.

J'ai tué Emma S....ou l'écriture colonisée (1976) and the stage play *Le Théâtre* (1976), in particular, are re-constituted from a sort of collage or a 'montage organisé par la répétition' (Polverel 2014, 101) that frequently repeats verbatim lengthy passages from the first three publications.[34] The play takes the written word and makes it flesh, the written *langue* is restored to its corporeal *génitrice*, and Santos here is more personally and bodily offering her *parole*, her *cri écrit* with the insistence of physical presence and the force of utterance, which constitutes a highly semiotic linguistic practice.[35]

While Polverel sees these collage-texts positively, as possessing 'une répétition motrice' (ibid., 105) that is innovative and 'une nouvelle forme d'expression [...] qui lui rend sa liberté' (Polverel 2014, 101), I find this evaluation overly optimistic. The Santosian writing project itself here becomes stuck like the narrator in the trilogy. While in the first three texts liminality and a-subjectivity are exploited for their liberating potential, the sense as we move on in the corpus is that the quest for recreation through writing is failing at this point. It is as though the louder she shouts, the more insistent she becomes, the more she is frustrated as she feels her words fall into silence: 'Ma folie est intérieure, dedans j'explose. Une explosion sans bruit. Je vais mourir en silence' (JTES 65). Le Garrec concludes of the texts at this point, 'Ils semblent tourner en rond, s'enrouler l'un autour de l'autre en une boucle qui se referme sur elle-même jusqu'au cercle dont Emma est la prisonnière' (1976), describing an *écriture* that has become a sort of Ouroboros eating its own tail, in an action that is both attempting nourishment of the self from the self and at the same moment resulting in destruction of the self by that very act of nourishment.

Kristeva acknowledges the risk involved in semiotic textual practice, and she describes the practice of the text, in particular in poetic language, as one in which the speaking subject becomes a *sujet-en-procès* (RLP 37). We can recognise in the Santosian narrator a *sujet-en-procès* that appears at this point to remain suspended in the process of its own re-iteration. This exploration into the processes constituting the subject that Santos has engaged in offers the possibility of transformation but also poses serious risks:

[34] The remaining two works before *Effraction au réel* (2006) are *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique* (1977) and *Écris et tais-toi* (1978).

[35] The one-woman play, under its full title, *Le Théâtre d'Emma Santos*, was staged by Claude Régy at the Nouveau Carré Silvia Montfort between December 1976 and February 1977, and Santos performed the role herself after failing to approve any of the actresses who came to audition (F.R. 1977). She would leave the hospital where at this point she was a voluntary in-patient, to appear on stage and do media interviews, returning there afterwards each night (le Garrec 1976; F.R. 1977).

> L'expérience textuelle....représente...l'une des explorations les plus hardies que le sujet puisse se permettre, du procès qui le constitue. Mais en même temps et en conséquence, elle touche au fondement même de la socialité : à ce qu'elle exploite pour se constituer, à ce qui la travaille et qui peut la dépasser, à ce qui peut la détruire ou la transformer. (RLP 67)

In attempting to transform the Symbolic, a semiotic textual practice may destroy the subject without achieving rebirth or any wider transformation. Kristeva has recourse to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) to recall his insistence that the most instinctual drive is the death drive, meaning the destructive wave is the most dominant, and this crucially signals the self-threatening risk involved in a textual practice exploring a return to a more drive-oriented semiotic position in language, and provides a framework to illuminate the dominant thematics of death and self-destruction in Santos's oeuvre. Kristeva recognises that language is a defensive construction (akin to the Lacanian concept of fantasy or the Freudian fetish), employed to screen the emerging subject from the drive to *jouissance*, and she considers how language may also in certain formulations reveal the death drive underlying it (RLP 47). Disturbances of the 'social censorship' involved in the transition to Symbolic signification attests to an influx of the death drive, 'C'est dans les pratiques « artistiques » que le sémiotique – condition du symbolique, se révèle être aussi son destructeur, et nous permet de présumer quelque chose de son fonctionnement' (RLP 47-8), and perhaps this is one thing that separates art from other linguistic expressions. Santos pits her texts in a direct attack on this social censorship, retreating to a pre-thetic, semiotic madness in an artistic practice of *signifiance* which threatens the Symbolic and the self enabled by that Symbolic.

Marie-Eve Bradette highlights what she sees as an important distinction between Kristeva's theory and Santosian discourse, 'La perte du corps propre et sa déchéance apparaissent, chez Kristeva, comme un danger, un péril. Chez Santos, cependant, nous avons plutôt l'impression que la distanciation de son propre corps par l'intrusion de l'autre en soi est souhaitée, appelée, voire provoquée, par Emma S' (2009, 36). It is true that there seems to be an explicit move towards self-destruction, both literally and figuratively, in the author's numerous suicide attempts, mimetically reproduced (or prefigured) in her writing. Santos' *écriture* at this point appears to mark a limitation to Kristeva's semiotic theory, as rather than becoming a

source of creative fertility, madness appears now only to produce sterility and self-iteration. It seems as though, as Ségeral argues, 'there can be no generation, only self-generation, after madness' (2014, 122). In terms of her autogenographic process, Santos now attempts to sever one umbilical cord in order to (re)generate an alternative identity. She tries to destroy her literary avatar, as described in *J'ai tué Emma S.....ou l'écriture colonisée*, as she cannot escape the extent to which her writing is always 'colonisée' or somehow poisoned by the language of the patriarchal Other, and continually comes crashing up against the indifference of that Symbolic language. She appears to feel that writing is not living, and she has invested in a false identity:

> j'ai tué Emma S., écrivaine avec un nom imposé par l'Homme, son nom à lui, femme littéraire et psychiatrique [...] femme inventée par jeu et j'y croyais. J'ai tué Emma S. pour rechercher une femme nouvelle, une femme pas encore née, prendre mon nom de renaissance. (JTES 86)

The line 'femme inventée par jeu' puns on the homophonicity of *jeu* and *je*, the ludic invention of the self as a game she plays herself, and in which she believed. Despite this apostasy of her faith in the ability of writing to either offer escape or a satisfactory sense of identity, Santos remains nonetheless engaged in her writing project, possibly out of dependence at this point. She continues to write, but she wants radically to alter the terms of the relationship again.

Her subsequent desire to escape the autogenographic fiction of the pseudonym, and the literary identity of *folle littéraire* within which she obviously feels trapped, is articulated in an essay entitled 'Le Désamour ou le désir de retrouver son nom' (1978, 9-10). In this article the desire to feel 'corporisée', embodied or physically present to herself in a more real way, given that the effect of literature and psychiatry has been to leave her 'complètement décorporisée', is a central concern, as is the intention to reclaim her own name instead of the pseudonym which has become 'ce nom qui m'arrache la peau' (1978, 9).[36] Santos/Le Goff reasserts a sense of identity not created in writing, or in some way external to her textual universe.[37] She writes:

[36] This relates to her move to theatre and insistence on playing the role herself.

[37] Her 'own name' is clearly no more extra-linguistic than the pen-name, as it is also a fiction given to her (by her father) in order for her to have a Symbolic identity, so she is simply destroying the name and identity that she

> Ce nom je le détruirai, ce nom il n'existera plus et mes livres sortiront sous mon véritable nom. Et maintenant ce sera fini la comédie du nom de Santos, ce sera la fin du nom de Santos, je ne veux plus entendre ce nom de Santos [...] Dès que mon livre sera publié sous le nom de Marie-Annick Le Goff je pourrai à ce moment-là faire, redisposer de ma vie, redevenir quelqu'un de vrai et non plus ce personnage imaginaire que tu veux mort. (1978, 10)

The major paradox is that she signs this statement of intent with the name Emma Santos, which of course is a necessary step for the reader to recognise the identity of the writing subject that is therein being destroyed.

It is this move, however confused the logic behind it, that represents Santos's effort to step out of the cycle of frustrated fetishistic repetition that her writing has become in the late-1970s. She did find a way out of this labyrinth of suspended subjectivity, and found new material and a new style with her final published work, *Effraction au réel*. She tells le Garrec

> Mon nouveau livre, déjà terminé, sera publié sous un autre nom. J'y enterre Emma Santos et ses obsessions. Le cadavre est encore vivant et il ressurgit de temps en temps mais je suis guérie. Être guérie, c'est parler de son passé comme de quelque chose de passé, sans douleur [...] Je suis encore psychiatrisée mais je ne suis plus la femme psychiatrique et littéraire de personne. Mon prochain livre sera le premier écrit pour moi. C'est le début de l'autonomie. (1976)

This idea of being 'guérie' as being able to speak about the past with a detached retrospective gaze, is noteworthy, as is the irony that she declares her 'cure' but remains 'psychiatrisée'. The 'prochain livre' she refers to here may be *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*, which appeared in 1977, but this latter was in effect little more than a further re-iteration of the earlier material, now newly ordered in what purports to be a sane 'itinerary' of the author's relationship with psychiatry and medicine (a more Symbolic strategy) attempting a more lucid account of the failure of that relationship: 'Je voudrais tenter d'expliquer mon entrée en psychiatrie, 8 (sic) années en psychiatrie en commetant les mêmes erreurs que les psychiatres, en chosifiant la malade, en me chosifiant' (LP, *Avant-propos* 7). Less literary, less moving and far less

---

has created herself, and we detect a sense in which this revolutionary *Femme-Folie* figure has outlived or failed her purpose.

powerful, this itinerary, generically closer to a psychiatric memoir, is a less interesting text, stylistically and aesthetically, though it has a certain documentary value, and offers an alternative perspective on events and incidents described in the early triptych.[38] What is more significant is how the quotation above from the le Garrec interview could be seen to relate to Santos' final work, *Effraction au réel,* which we know she wanted desperately to publish under her real name, something *des femmes* refused to do (Le Goff 2012). I will now consider this last text's (feminist) political and literary merit, before concluding with a discussion both of the circumstances of its publication, delayed until 2006, and the author's suicide in 1983.

Surrealist Sublimation: *Effraction au réel*

If Santos may be seen to have fetishised her abjection in her earlier texts, I argue that in her final work, *Effraction au réel* (2006), she turns to a textual practice aimed at sublimating this abjection. This work is radically different from the previous eight texts in style and content, and is both avant-garde and surrealist. With *Effraction* there is a major shift from the previous compulsive reiteration of the same material to new themes, characters and scenarios. For Kristeva, literature of the avant-garde possesses a particular potency of semiotic linguistic power, and she writes that, 'la littérature moderne, dans ses variantes multiples, et lorsqu'elle s'écrit comme le langage enfin possible de cet impossible qu'est l'a-subjectivité ou la non-objectivité, propose en fait une sublimation de l'abjection (1980, 34). *Effraction* presents an *écriture* unsettling subjectivity and reversing the processes of normative discourse, while nonetheless producing a literary document that transcends the endless reiterations of Santos' middle period.

Santos adopts a strategy of satirical inscription, attempting to reconcile the semiotic and Symbolic modalities, and accommodate the abject within the Symbolic as that which is *unknown*, rather than that which is outcast or excluded.[39] Santos wishes to inscribe her writing, her malady and her mad protest alongside a mad canon of male French authors of the avant-garde including Gérard de Nerval, Antonin Artaud, Louis-Ferdinand Céline and André Breton among others, 'Et Pascal et ses douleurs à la tête, et Flaubert et son épilepsie, et

[38] For example, on p.19 there is a quasi-realist description of the asylum ward; there are descriptions of positive care from nurses and further references to 'La Dame Psychiatre', who is now described in less fantastical, metaphoric terms.

[39] See Kristeva's discussion in relation to Oedipus at Colonnus (1980, 87-8).

Rousseau et ses obsessions, et Maupassant et ses troubles mentaux et madame XYZ et le gonflement de sa gorge (ER 46).[40] The title's use of the term 'effraction' alerts us to the incursion posited here, a breaking-in, as Santos tries to achieve the *transposition* she previously struggled with, 'transposition' being a term Kristeva uses for intertextuality as another means of unsettling or corrupting the Symbolic, alongside metonymy and metaphor (RLP 60).[41] Santos finally transcends the earlier struggle and engages her writing in a dialectic with male authors. This text is riddled with literary and cultural references and allusions, becoming almost a patchwork-quilt of multiple pieces of earlier textual material, (among which only two female authors feature, Nathalie Sarraute and Françoise Sagan).[42] A major source of intertextuality which I focus on here is Breton's paradigmatic surrealist work *Nadja* (1928).[43] Santos rewrites his male *effraction* of the Symbolic into her own, in a shift from her earlier protest against a set of misogynistic codes to a satirical reversal of those codes which also reverses the binary of sane masculine/insane feminine. To this extent, her *effraction au réel* also posits breaking into reality with mad discourse, or discourse reflecting an alternative logic not recognised as such by the normative logic of hegemonic discourse.

The style and thematics in *Effraction* are quite different from Santos's previous texts. Idiosyncratic poeticism combines with a disjointed surrealist narrative and ellipsis is now used more judiciously. Description and dialogue are far lengthier than before, we have characters in a new sense, and a largely third-person narrative with a number of female protagonists for the first time *not* named Emma. At every turn, the stability of characters and realist description are unsettled and rendered surreal through the incoherent pastiche of textual elements that at first glance appear unrelated. The pathos and emotive power of the early trilogy, lost I would argue in the interim period, is recovered here and the prose is often poetic and powerfully emotional. Rather than being repelled by the repetition in the clutch of texts since *La Loméchuse*, the reader is here successfully drawn in by the intensity and the sense of absolute conviction that this author has something urgent to say. This intensity is frequently relieved by humour, irony, self-awareness and ludic self-deprecation, and the global effect is a

[40] 'Madame xyz' here clearly refers to Santos the author herself and her thyroid problems.
[41] The illicit, criminal connotations of the word *effraction* also recalls Beauvoir's use of the verb 'steal' or *voler* in relation to women's use of language, as discussed in Chapter One.
[42] References are made to artists, musicians and writers of antiquity as well as her contemporaries, including da Vinci; Klimt; Duchamp; Racine; Wilde; Giraudoux; Kafka; Jazz singers Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington among many others in an eclectic mixed bag.
[43] Another central intertextual source is Céline's writing, in particular *Guignol's Band* and *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, a consideration of which falls outside the scope of this project, but invites further study.

tragi-comic narrative. There is a renewed sense of hope and certainty in relation to the text's potential to use language to change language:

> les mots seront corps immense futur joie rire, fleur-lettre, feuille d'amour mouvante, un geste, une danse, une célébration, des merveilles, notre royaume, un orchestre, une symphonie, partition, lyre, le geste de ma main vers toi, nos cris et rires du feu, des océans d'un blanc mystérieux, des mots en couleurs [...] loin des mots boiteux, la sève et le sang, la vie. (ER 68-9)

This enumerative accumulation of musical and bodily sounds, colours, light, and human movement is highly semiotic, in a way more resonant of Eros than Thanatos, and the use of the future tense in 'seront' recovers the celebratory tone of *L'Illulogicienne* and *La Loméchuse*.

The pronominal instability and displacement between subject and object of earlier texts recurs, and now there is a careful pattern traceable as the text progresses through the three sections dividing it up (numbered simply with roman numerals), and the text asks along with the narrator, 'Comment être sujet au lieu de devenir objet?'(ER 76). Initially, in the prologue, the female protagonist is a reincarnation of Breton's Nadja and bears the same name, she then becomes 'Hermine' in section II, a pastiched object of Bretonian Surrealism, but resurfaces as Nadja only to slide, along with her lover Alphonse, into the anonymity of 'il' and 'elle', flipping back again later to being Hermine, though now with a male character named Morgan. The third section then opens with 'elle' but just one page later slips imperceptibly into a first-person narrative, and a female *je* assumes the speaking position until the end of the text. This dizzying disorientation of subjectivity is coupled with a more hyperbolic disorientation of time and place than in the early trilogy. One moment we are in post-war France; the next we are in a timeless, post-apocalyptic scene of devastation in which Hermine alone survives along with the insects; and another moment we are in a pre-historical (pre-human, pre-Symbolic) scene and the protagonist is described playing with dinosaurs.

Some of the more interesting facets of Bretonian intertextuality reveal much about the sophistication of this text and its project. Santos appropriates Surrealism's politics and satirises the sexism of the movement to present a feminist *remaniement* of Surrealism, thus opening a critical dialectic with a masculinist ideology, while appropriating elements of that ideology for feminism and her own idiosyncratic revolution. Johanna Malt articulates how

Surrealism, by elaborating the 'logic of the object to the point of collapse', exposes an alternative logic of the object which contains 'a critique of patriarchy [and] a gesture of assault on all phallic authority – paternal and political' (2004, 140). *Nadja* is an immediate and emphatic intertext in *Effraction*, made explicit through the use of dates, character names and echoed motifs of plot. *Effraction*'s prologue is headed '4 octobre 1926'. This date is taken from the opening of the second section of Breton's text, the date of his first chance encounter with the woman he came to call Nadja (Breton 1963, 56). *Effraction*'s 'jeune femme fantôme' (ER 11) introduces herself in the Santosian chance encounter as Nadja, a clear satire of Breton's fantasmic sexist objectification of the real woman inspiring his text and his ideology. The 4th of October also heads the second and third sections of Santos' text, though now the year is 1978 and 1979 respectively, the years the manuscript was written, and the effect is to concertina time between the two texts, drawing them closer still.

Having reincarnated Nadja, Santos then operates her *effraction*, replacing her Nadja with Hermine, thus overwriting the Bretonian avatar. This name, Hermine, also carries important Bretonian traces which warrant consideration. There are at least two sources for the name Hermine in Breton's work. The first is from Breton's text *Nadja* itself when a line of poetry by Jarry is read aloud by Nadja, 'Chasse de leur acier la martre et l'hermine', evoking the soft-furred creature hunted by cold steely certainty to a death it flees but cannot escape (1963, 71).[44] The poem this line is taken from speaks of martyrs' bones and deaf-mutes wandering spectrally, echoing themes of martyrdom and linguistic impairment now familiar in Santos' corpus. The second potential source is from a reading of Breton's untitled *poème-objets* from 1937.[45] This poem describes an encounter with a woman on a stormy night, much like the stormy conditions of the opening encounter of *Effraction*. Among the collage-objects breaking up the words is a small stuffed stoat, or ermine, often read by critics as 'hermine' fur, thus potentially evoking a woman's fur coat. I find compelling Malt's suggestion that Breton meant this to be a rebus, using the first syllable of 'er/mine' to work as the missing syllable of the poem's second line ending '...pour la premi', missing an 'er'. The female-identified object is then exploited to fill the gap in male language, leaving a discarded syllable of excess. This syllable itself, *mine*, denotes variously a deep dark hole to mine (meaning) from; a small

[44] *Nadja*, p.71. The poem appears originally in *Les Jours et les nuits* (1897).
[45] A full reading of this second poem can be found in Malt's insightful analysis (2004, 156).

object used to write with; or appearance – which can be recognised as connoting the female object of language in a culturally negative way.

In my view, it should be impossible to read *both* the above parallels as coincidence, given the intimate knowledge of Surrealism Santos possessed. We are then led by the use of 'Hermine' to consider Santos' protagonist as a sort of intertextual rebus, a vehicle to complete the language of man (or men), a task enabled by demystifying woman's aestheticization. Nadja was arguably a woman martyred by psychiatry and sacrificed by Breton for his supposedly revolutionary ideology. Her name was actually Léona, and when she later suffered mental illness Breton abandoned her completely. He had overwritten her identity (and not just in relation to her name) to replace it with one of his own creation, thus possessing her image, and Léona had the following reaction on reading his notes for the text ostensibly about her, 'How could I read this report [...] glimpse this distorted picture of myself without rebelling, or even crying'.[46] Santos's Hermine narrates the story from the martyred woman's own point of view. The so-called madwoman of misogynistic literary creation is placed in the subject position and given a voice with which she answers back to reverse her objectification. This woman's rebellion and tears are what fill the pages of *Effraction* and the *je* narrative carrying through until the text's close gives a voice to the abjected female of language.[47]

Having been given a voice, what does she say with it? The text's surrealist narrator reverses and recasts the discourse of madness to subvert its inherent misogyny. In section II of Santos's *remaniement*, the story of Nadja's meeting with 'Alphonse' is written with the man now as the object, and later Hermine assumes the position of adjudicator of sanity and diagnoses her male lover's putative normality as in fact a form of insanity: 'Diagnostic fait par Hermine: Vit une certaine normalité qui n'a rien à voir avec la santé' (ER 163). His symptoms are obsessive collecting and fetishisation of antiques, as well as delusions of sovereignty, which lead Hermine to the judgement, 'Conclusion: à interner. Pavillon fermé. Pas de courier, pas de coiffeur, pas de tabac, bibliothèque interdite, aucun objet personnel, pas de vêtement' and 'Traitement: castration' (ibid.). Santos therefore appropriates the subversive potential Breton saw in Surrealism in order to transpose the Symbolic into a modality in which the abjected

[46] Reported in Mark Polizzotti's Introduction to the 1999 edition of *Najda* (xvi).
[47] A similar recasting of Breton's *Nadja* is at work in German author Unica Zürn's *L'Homme Jasmin* (1970: translated into French in 1971). For an interesting analysis of points of contact between the writing of Zürn and Santos see Nathalie Ségeral (2014).

term may be rehabilitated and acknowledged, even listened to, and can become itself the voice of authority, casting judgement.

A recently-uncovered essay by surrealist thinker Tristan Tzara allows us to see the points of intersection between Kristeva's semiotic, revolution, Surrealism and Santos's textual practice in *Effraction.*[48] Reconsidering the destructive politics of Surrealism, Tzara writes

> Ce mouvement, en quoi on s'est plu à ne trouver que le côté destructif, était-il nécessaire? [...] il est certain que la *table rase* dont nous faisions le principe directeur, n'avait de valeur que dans la mesure où *autre chose* devait y succéder. Il s'agissait de changer un état considéré comme nuisible et informe. (1946, 9; original italics)

He describes the imperative for the poet to commit uncompromisingly, with a total abnegation, 'jusqu'à la limite même de son existence' and he saw this engagement as constituting revolution, 'l'action révolutionnaire [...] et la poésie, devaient avoir une commune mesure, une unique racine, un seul aboutissant: la liberté de l'homme' (ibid., 9-10). He goes on, 'Il faut avoir risqué la mort, l'avoir côtoyé, pour atteindre à la conscience. Avoir joué le tout pour le tout dans cette lutte pour la vie qu'est l'affirmation de soi' (1946, 12). Santos takes her writing project and her textual practice into the linguistic and political space Tzara describes here, in order to extend the Surrealist vision to *la liberté de la femme* and an 'affirmation de soi' for women. When Tzara writes of poetry as ubiquitous in a latent state, to be found 'chez l'enfant et l'aliéné' and above all as 'un sentiment [qui] préside à la formation du langage' (1946, 10), we recognize core elements of both the Kristevan and Santosian discourses of semiotic madness.

The closing lines of *Effraction* are significant, written four years before Santos' suicide and closing a decade of her writing about women, madness and the extremes of the self and language. The narrator concludes of her lover, an artist, that 'il est incapable d'un dialogue' (ER 206), and subsequently appears to embrace death as the only option facilitating rebirth, an unavoidable self-sacrifice, paradoxically, 'comme une morte qui serait vivante' (ER 217). This life through death contrasts with the Antigonal living death (death in life) of women witnessed at moments in Beauvoir and Lê's texts. *Effraction,* and Santos's corpus, end with the

[48] This essay was originally presented as a lecture at the Anglo-French Art Centre, London, 25th Sept, 1946. The archive of the *ADAM International Review* in which it is published is held by King's College London.

image of a dragonfly emerging from the larval state 'pour dégager les ailes vers un autre ciel que les plafonds d'une chambre' (ibid.) and we read the following unsettling though not pessimistic lines:[49]

> Aucun obstacle ne me fera trébucher et je ne me retournerai pas. Femme indestructible comme puceronne. J'aurai la force de marcher sur mon cadavre, me relever et retomber comme le tonnerre dans une lumière éblouissante hors du temps. Belle comme une naissance. (ER 217)

She is both dead and reborn, walking over her own corpse. There is no more abortion, death leads to rebirth, and the future tense reinstalls a sense of certainty and determination. The self-sacrifice is performed in order to provide the signifier that will establish a new signifying practice and a transformed Symbolic. This sublimation of self-sacrifice performed by the text suggests a form of textual martyrdom that will enable rebirth and revolution, and arguably performs a similar function at this point for Santos as the sublimated sacrifice in Linda Lê's *In memoriam* and *Cronos*, a death on the diegetic level to enable life and language on the extratextual level, as we shall see in Chapter Five. However, whereas in Lê's corpus this process may be seen to have culminated successfully, for Santos the outcome was very different.

I return here to Santos' interview with le Garrec, which it is useful to repeat in part:

> Mon nouveau livre, déjà terminé, sera publié sous un autre nom. J'y enterre Emma Santos et ses obsessions. [...] je suis guérie. Être guérie, c'est parler de son passé comme de quelque chose de passé, sans douleur [...] Mon prochain livre sera le premier écrit pour moi. C'est le début de l'autonomie. (1976)

Santos thus articulates her vision of a way out of the Ouroborosian cycle of writing and rewriting the same mad protest in which she evidently recognised herself as being stuck. She sees how attaining a sense of distance from the painful material of the past may enable her to achieve some level of autonomy. It is made clear in this quotation that this process depends heavily for Santos on being able to 'bury' her pseudonym and the *Femme-Folie* with it, and publish under a different name – her own name. *Effraction au réel* represented for Santos a

[49] The Cixousian metaphor of *voler* for female literary production is here given a Santosian surrealist twist.

document of attempted transcendence, of healing and a significant move towards autonomy. She was at this point, at the beginning of the 1980s, living independently outside the psychiatric system. She attempted repeatedly to publish *Effraction au réel* with *des femmes*, under the name Marie-Annick Le Goff, but the editors refused, insisting the name Emma Santos be used in order for publication to go ahead (Le Goff 2012).[50] According to the Le Goff sisters, a stale-mate ensued, with a deeply-frustrated Santos withholding the text under those circumstances.[51] Following her death, the manuscript was held by the family until after both her parents had died in 2005, at which time Armelle Le Goff resubmitted it to *des femmes*, and it was eventually published, under the name Emma Santos.

The author has thus been permanently confined within the fiction of her own making, and the illusional subject of the pseudonym ultimately overwhelms the author's identity in an inescapable, self-imposed form of catachresis. At the time of her suicide, the manuscript remained unpublished, along with another new work, on the closing page of which Santos has written 'Fin 1982. Fin pour toujours' in red ink. She died a matter of weeks later, in early 1983. It is unwise to speculate about how closely these thwarted attempts to publish under her own name can be linked to her suicide in the absence of further information and also in light of the many previous attempts she had made on her life. However, it is evident that this move to reclaim a lost identity, one over-written by her own writing and its autogenographic mad revolution, as well as by psychiatric and feminist discourses, and to continue publishing, represented vitally important steps to autonomy, liberation and healing for Santos.

What can be concluded is that despite her misgivings and frustrations about the nature of language and the destructive potential of writing to produce a false or alienated sense of identity, nevertheless the desire to speak or write – in short, to communicate – was a huge driver for Santos, and her writing project was enormously important for her, as protest, catharsis, survival, aesthetic sublimation and as contact with others. It was a way to navigate between the worlds of madness and language (or Symbolic society), the *dedans* and the *dehors*. She was not a writer who wrote purely or even mainly for personal satisfaction and

[50] Santos's frustrations with the publishing industry were ventilated in *Écris et tais-toi*, where she details the difficulties facing her because of her status as a woman, particularly a woman with a psychiatric record. Her rift with *des femmes*, owned by a woman, inserts a retrospective irony into her line in *J'ai tué Emma S.*, 'les femmes écrivent et les hommes vendent leurs mots' (JTES 40).

[51] Armelle Le Goff is critical of *des femmes'* poor efforts to publicise the new novel, describing its publication as 'très confidentiel', and the family feels the publishing house has done very little to promote Santos' work. My own and Elsa Polverel's contacts with *des femmes* confirm that they are circumspect, to say the least. The death of Antoinette Fouque in February 2014 may lead to a change of culture.

enjoyment. It mattered to her that her writing was published. That publication on the terms she desired was thwarted, was at the least a severe disappointment.

Santos's case highlights yet again the continuing difficulty for a woman author – even in the apogee moment of feminism in France and supported by a feminist publisher – to effect a successful incursion of the socio-Symbolic through writing. The *effraction* of the semiotic into the Symbolic is not easily undertaken or achieved. To return finally to Gilbert and Gubar and Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason, we may conclude that things both have and have not evolved for the female author in the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1970s. The madwoman may have taken up the pen for herself, freed herself and her narrative from its attic to impose her subjectivity. However, this subjectivity remains in crisis, suspended in a threatened liminality. The narrative now joins the madwoman, writing from inside the asylum she has sought in madness, which appears to have become a voluntary refuge. When she gathers the courage required to escape that refuge, to inscribe a literary document of her own into the canon, she does not always find the conditions necessary to support that inscription.

I used the term 'marginalised' at the start of this chapter, and it is worth returning to interrogate this term and my use of it, in light of Beauvoir's alignment of the marginal with the revolutionary at the end of the 1970s. In an interview in which she uses the words radical and revolutionary repeatedly, Beauvoir says, 'I reject the word marginality. I would rather say revolutionary, radical' and adds that 'feminism is one way of attacking society as it now exists, therefore it is a revolutionary movement' (Jardine 1979, 226; 227). For Santos personally revolution may appear to have failed or been arrested at an attitude of revolt that ended in abnegation for the author. However, her corpus of nine texts survives to form part of a greater poetic movement of anti-doxy in feminism and post-modernism, that has left literature and language, and the way we look at truths, including the truths of 'woman', permanently changed. Butler dismisses the semiotic force for change thus, 'it is unclear that the subversive effects of such drives can serve, via the semiotic, as anything more than a temporary and futile disruption of the hegemony of the paternal law' (1990, 109), although it must be conceded that for Santos personally her sense of triumph was ephemeral, her writing formed part of a discourse, i.e. 1970s French feminism, which cannot be described as 'futile' or having temporary effects. To this extent, therefore, Emma Santos – Marie-Annick Le Goff – can perhaps be seen as having succeeded in writing 'la folie triomphante'.

-- Chapter Four --

The Uncanny Crisis in Linda Lê's *Voix* and *Lettre morte*

If Emma Santos offers us a particular insight into the figure of the madwoman at the height of the twentieth-century feminist revolution in France, what becomes of the figure in the subsequent period, in other words, in our contemporary context? In this chapter and the next, I track the movement of the figure of the madwoman in the writing of Franco-Vietnamese author Linda Lê, to argue that if we can read Emma Santos as signalling a swing to the (semiotic) mother, in Lê's early corpus we see a swing once more away from the cultural mother and back towards the father.[1] The paternal figure is, however, troubled and spectral, devoid of the substance of his earlier authority and dethroned, which may reflect how cultural conceptions of masculinity have been questioned and redefined in recent years, partly as a result of changes brought about by feminism. This recalibration, which might be described as a dethroning of the patriarch in some measure, appears to create a vacuum of authority, 'le monde sans Dieu' (Lê in Argand 1999) and produce 'orphaned' characters, particularly in Lê's later works. In the uncanny crisis in *Voix: une crise* (1998) that I focus on in this chapter, we recognise the persistence of an anxiety of female authorship, and from *Lettre morte* (1999) throughout Lê's later works we witness the strategies aiming to overcome this anxiety, which I discuss in Chapter Five. These strategies include a potentially problematic queering of the woman author through various internalisations of the masculine (firstly the father; later the brother-lover; and finally the unborn son), accompanied by a correlative abjection of the maternal and the feminine, reaching an apogee in the martyring sacrifice of the *femme de lettres.* This self-sacrifice presents a paradoxical means of overcoming female authorial anxiety, until we see the sacrifice finally displaced onto the pre-emptive sacrifice of the unborn son.

The period from the 1980s to the present brings us from French feminism's radical, revolutionary mood of female empowerment to the *extrême contemporain*, a so-called post-feminist context which appears, from the proximity of this study's perspective, to present a far

[1] This shift of attention to the paternal is not peculiar to Lê. Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand documents an increased focus among women writers on the father-daughter relationship in the fifteen years prior to 2008, contrasting with the focus on the mother in the 1970s and 1980s (2008, 49-50).

more complicated and arguably less self-affirming period for feminism(s) and women. Women authors' previously enthusiastic identification with 'women's writing' or *écriture féminine* appears less emphatic in this period. While many women writers, including major figures such as Marguerite Duras, continued to acknowledge the centrality of gender to their writing projects, the previous period's urgent and radical insistence on a particularly *female* writing project faded.[2] It may be tempting to see the past thirty years as a golden era for the woman author, yet, while there has been in some ways a 'new fascination with the figure of the female author' (Jordan 2004, 15), this has not always translated into serious acknowledgement of these female authors' intellectual merit.

Headlines such as 'Les femmes d'abord' and 'La nouvelle école des femmes' in recent years contributed to a sense that 'a momentous era for French women writers was just beginning' (ibid., 16). However, quantitative analysis gives the lie to this optimism, and reveals the fascination to be a mediatisation relatively unmatched in substance. Women certainly *are* writing and publishing in great numbers, but how much serious recognition are they receiving? In some contexts, it can be argued that women's writing is simply ignored, or dismissed as 'chick lit' when it is too popular to be ignored, such as the Amélie Nothomb phenomenon, for example.[3] Following comprehensive research of literary prizes and publishing figures in France, Nathalie Morello and Catherine Rodgers conclude in 2002 that, 'La présence des femmes dans la littérature au cours des dix dernières années est loin d'avoir autant progressé qu'on ne le laisse parfois entendre, que ce soit au niveau des ouvrages publiés, des prix littéraires obtenus ou de la reconnaissance critique' (2002, 8). According to their figures, despite the dramatically increased media presence, things have not changed much, if at all, for women in the literary scene.[4] At the dawn of the new millenium, then, the supposed new dawn of women's literary influence on the French cultural scene may have

[2] Shirley Jordan's excellent study of contemporary women's writing indicates that many began to see the label 'women's writing' as ghettoising and perpetuating women's marginalisation (2004, 14).

[3] Images of an exotic, attractive Nothomb appear on the front cover of almost all her novels, thus encouraging the fetishisation of the author over the writing, and this is a notable phenomenon of women's novels in particular. By contrast, Linda Lê's photograph does not appear on her texts, and she is notoriously media-shy.

[4] Marcelle Marini's research reveals the proportion of fiction publishing in the years from 1980 to 1990 to be roughly 70-75% men: 25-30% women – surprisingly similar to the figures for the years 1950-55, at 75% men: 25% women (1992, 284). Fallaize's trawl of literary prizes awarded in the ten years to 1990 shows that of the top four prizes (Goncourt; Renaudot; Medicis; Interallié), out of a total of forty awards only seven went to women. Despite an all-female jury for the Prix Fémina, in the same period only five went to women writers (1993, 20). Morello & Rodgers' study of the situation in the following ten years to 2000 showed a *worsening*, with the percentage of literary prizes falling 9% to just 21% for women (2002, 11-12).

proven to be a false one.[5] Although there has been considerable social, legal and economic progress for women, the position and Symbolic power (one could use Harold Bloom's term 'influence') of the writing woman cannot be taken for granted.

Female madness is central to Linda Lê's corpus, from her very earliest novels published in the late 1980s to the Antigonal or sacrificial madness dominating her most recent works of the last decade.[6] The male subject is also shown to be often in crisis, and at times suffers alongside his 'mad sister', and this warrants some consideration, but I will here retain my main focus on Lê's major twin thematics of female madness and sacrificial suicide. Significantly, in Lê the mad woman is also the writing woman, and each putatively mad female character is a *femme de lettres* in one way or another. This trope evolves from a psychotic figure in crisis, in an asylum, in psychological and physical decomposition in works such as *Voix, Lettre morte* and *Conte de l'amour bifrons,* to a figure of defiance, symbolising a Lêian *refus* which culminates in a suicide (or suicidal act) presented as rebellious in *In memoriam* and *Cronos*. I will concentrate in this chapter on *Voix* (1998), the middle work in the early mad trilogy begun with *Les Trois Parques* (1997) and ending with *Lettre morte* (1999). The central female protagonists and narrators in the trilogy confront mental crisis, psychosis, hallucinations and/or feelings of self-loathing that lead to self-harm and attempted suicide. In Chapter Five I will turn to examine later manifestations of female madness in the corpus and, in particular, themes of hermaphroditic madness and Antigonal sacrifice.

We are driven to ask why the madwoman, along with her self-sacrifice (the suicide is ubiquitously presented in such terms) is such a dominant, recurrent figure in the writing of a prolific, critically successful author of such obvious literary ability and linguistic prowess? What may we read from the madwoman's omnipresence and presentation? Why is the figure of the madwoman *still* so present and so problematic in writing by women in our time, and what might Lê's madwoman tell us about women and their position in language *now*, in the post-68, post-*écriture féminine* and so-called 'post-feminist', context? In this chapter and the next I attempt to offer some answers to these questions.

In reading Lê's madwoman, I pay particular attention to the topos of mobility/immobility, which takes us back to the spatial metaphor inherent in Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of the

[5] Atack & Powrie similarly draw attention to the 'relative absence' of women in literary studies and criticism in France (1990, 3).

[6] As Siobhán McIlvanney observes, 'madness is always lurking on the periphery in Lê's work, when it is not its principal subject matter' (2009, 377).

anxiety of female authorship in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and leads us to ask how positively we can read the re-performed female sacrifice of Lê's texts. How far have we come from the situation of *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason, another involuntary *exilée* brought from the colonies and imprisoned in the soft cell of the homely loft only to liberate herself by stepping off the roof into suicide? Nicole Ward-Jouve assesses the situation of the contemporary female writer thus, 'The eighties have pushed both to the outskirts: women, experimental writing. Bertha Mason is back in the tower from which she had descended. Her voice is heard only as mad laughter, at best a distant utterance' (1990, 138). This statement, which we may test through Lê's work, expresses a frustration that I can only partially share, because there is a rich, diverse and dynamic body of women's writing emerging, coming out of the various forms of female-gendered imprisonment, into the Symbolic. Among these women is Linda Lê, presenting a corpus dominated by the figure of the madwoman.

Hérétique, Pygmalion, Française? Lê's Troublesome Illegitimacy

To understand the madness within Lê's novels it is important to understand the context from which both the madness and the novels are drawn. In her very first novel, *Un si tendre vampire* (1987), Lê describes one of her characters as an 'écrivain austère dont l'encre ressemble à du sang séché', and this neatly captures some of the defining features of Linda Lê as an author.[7] For her, the blood of being and the ink of writing are inextricably tied, and her novels are filled with images of this cross-pollution of blood and ink, of writing and being or indeed *non*-being. Although always fiction, her novels draw heavily from her own biography, and Jack A. Yeager notes that 'Lê blurs the lines between autobiography and fiction, French and Vietnamese, the personal and the plural' (2000). Her writing may comprise autofictional elements, but is not autobiography, and Lê is ever at pains to draw a clear demarcation between her life and her texts, although this resolute distancing can often become strained. She avowedly draws from the depths of the personal in order to attain the universal: 'J'ai tenté [...] d'atteindre une dimension presque universelle, ne pas rester dans l'autobiographie, faire de la mort du père une mort symbolique' (Argand 1999) and she repeats later, 'une tentative de donner une dimension mythique à cette autobiographie imaginaire [...] J'aime

[7] Michèle Bacholle-Bošković reads Lê as identifying with the character Phillipe who bears this description in that text, through her valorisation of his model of an author over alternative models in the narrative (2006, 3).

mêler les fils des deux sphères pour atteindre à la dimension de l'éternel humain' (Loucif 2007, 887).

However much she affirms her detachment, Lê acknowledges the extent to which her characters are drawn from deep within herself, 'Tous les personnages principaux incarnent une part de moi à un moment ou à un autre...c'est un *moi dispersé* que je présente' (Loucif 2007, 891; my emphasis) and '[j]e suis tous les personnages à la fois, quels qu'ils soient. Hommes ou femmes, ils m'habitent' (Personal interview 2012).[8] Her characters are not 'Linda Lê', yet elements of the author are in(vested) in each of them, and in a reciprocal relationship they inhabit her also. As Virginia Woolf states so elegantly: 'Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works' (*Orlando: A Biography* in Woolf 2007, 499). We might consider Lê's writing process as employing Freudian 'decomposition', described by Henk de Berg as a process that 'instead of blending different ideas into one, *disunites* the various components of one idea (or one person)' (2003, 89; original emphasis), components that Lê then re-composes in new manifestations. For Lê, writing is an uncompromising, brutal, often cruel process of composition of a self constantly engaged in de-composition and in need of re-composition, once again through writing. In Lê's narratives, both self and text are compulsively written, destroyed and re-written, and we see sketched the broken (out)lines of numerous female writer-narrators, reminiscent of the Kristevan *sujet-en-procès*, a subjectivity constantly in the process of creating and being created, in what can be seen as a form of *écriture-en-procès*. The term autogenography, as I have outlined in my Introduction, can be used to describe Lê's particular style of writing, which is not a looking back on the self in writing, but is rather a dynamic and constant re-generation of the self in and through writing, as we shall see in particular in Chapter Five.

The roots, or rootlessness, of Linda Lê's 'littérature déplacée' (Yeager 1997, 263) have long been recognized as related to the circumstances of her childhood exile from Vietnam to France.[9] The core elements of her biography are now cornerstones of the Lêian legend. Born in 1963, she came to France as a fourteen-year-old with her three sisters in 1977, because of the war in Vietnam. Following an autocratic mother with whom she had a problematic relationship, she left behind her beloved but troubled father, who died in 1995 before Lê ever

[8] This reminds us of Bainbrigge's reading of Beauvoir's identification with Henri Perron in *Les Mandarins*, and the capacity for authors to cross-dress through their characters.

[9] Lê used this term as the title for the *après-propos* to her *Tu écriras sur le bonheur* (1999), a collection of forty prefaces she wrote for Livre de Poche on world-renowned authors.

saw him again. Her evident preoccupation, indeed, obsession, with the lost, lamented father and her bi-cultural background often inform an understandable critical preoccupation with the cultural hybridity and destabilised national/cultural identity in her texts, frequently described as 'liminal', 'exilic', 'threshold' or 'entre-deux'.[10] Although born in Vietnam to Vietnamese parents, Lê's mother became a naturalized French citizen, and encouraged her daughters' education through the French language and schooling system even in Vietnam. Once in France, Lê shone as a student and won the privilege to study for the *khâgne* at the elite Lycée Henri IV in Paris, which allowed her access to the very heart and heritage of French occidental culture.

This *entre-deux*-ness of her background is reflected in practical terms in the cultural reception of Lê in France and elsewhere, down to her classification and the mundane question of shelving. Yeager observes how Parisian bookstores appear unable to decide where she fits, alternately placing her with French writers, as in FNAC, or classed under 'Sudestasie' elsewhere (1997, 264). Sabine Loucif also comments on this schizophrenia towards Lê's work, recognizing a transatlantic split between the US and French academies, with the latter viewing Lê as a French author 'dont la sophistication littéraire trouve sa source sur les bancs d'une prestigieuse Khâgne parisienne' whereas in the US, '[on] ne peut la nommer sans parler du pays de sa naissance' (2007, 880).[11] This confusion and the hybridity occasioning it are seized upon by critics eager to de-centre or destabilize homogenising conceptions of French 'national culture' as part of the postcolonial discourse recalibrating 'nationalism'. Yeager among others sees Lê as a subversive or transgressive force within French culture, one that 'undermines calls in France for linguistic and cultural purity' by forcing a redefinition of ideas of nation, national identity and territoriality and, in his view, Lê

> creates her place within the French language, claims her rights within this linguistic community, and thus redefines what it means to be French, to speak French, and to write in French. *Lê carves out a linguistic space*, appropriates and reinvents language and the French novel [...] *Writing from this invented space she creates a homeland.* (Yeager 1997, 265; my emphasis)

[10]See for example Bacholle-Bošković (2006); McIlvanney (2009); Selao (2011); Averis (2011). Her name is a symbolic reflection of this hybridity, the Western Linda paired with the Vietnamese surname Lê.
[11] This American focus on Lê's ties to Vietnam may be related to the US's own fascination with that country as a result of the American-Vietnamese War (1956-1975).

This bold affirmation of Lê's subversive force must be tested and the nature and quality of this 'linguistic space' and 'homeland' created by Lê explored, and we are impelled to question how positive this space is, and at what cost this linguistic reinvention comes. The homeland she creates is 'invented' and exists in and through language, therefore it is by examining her texts that we may 'visit' Lê's self-created linguistic home.

The desire of postcolonialism to 'claim' Lê as its own, combined with the liminal and hybrid nature of her writing, make it easy to understand how some critics have drawn parallels between her corpus and Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space' in *The Location of Culture* (1994).[12] His project is one of opening-up to a new 'third term' deconstructing tradition and traditional binaries of race, culture and nation(alism). The apparent elasticity or flexibility of Bhabha's term is largely due to his highly abstract and abstruse style. Benita Parry describes it thus, 'an enchantment with troping, punning, and riddling that all too often send the signifier into free-fall' (2002, 245).[13] Despite the sophistry, there is considerable substance to Bhabha's theory, and he conceives of an *au-delà* beyond traditional ideas of nationhood, 'once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure' (1994, 21), yet it is a beyond that is nonetheless still 'internal to [a] national identity [...] a space of intervention in the here and now' (ibid., 6-7). Bhabha insists on the idea of location, that culture needs a place, and even though it can be 'displaced', this implies a movement to another 'place'.

The exilic rootlessness of Lê's writing - inspiring images of floating waterlilies, anchorless vessels, deleuzo-guattarian deterritorialisation, and the female *acéphale* – repeatedly produces a willed failure to find a place, that contrasts with Bhabha's cultural location. There is no doubt that she points to an *au-delà,* but we may be compelled to consider that Lê's beyond is beyond Bhabha's 'Third Space', and her *écriture* may arguably end up 'de nulle part' (Bacholle-Bošković 2006, 8) or 'neither here nor there' (Averis 2009). The exile evoked in Lê's novels, the trajectory of her 'mad' *femmes de lettres* and the authorial self-image she adorns herself with for much of her career, would appear to take her beyond all national borders to an aspirational supra-national dis-position, and the 'post' boundary appears to be a place from

[12] For example, the comparison is made by Leslie Barnes (2007, 132), and Selao also identifies Lê's father figure in *Les Trois Parques* with a Bhabhian Third Space (2011, 187).

[13] Her main criticism, though, is the extent to which she sees his abstract theorising overwhelming the 'muddy reality' of the (post)colonial experience (2002, 147; 151).

which her narrators or central protagonists (very often female) begin a metaphysical *non*-presencing. Her characters are spectral and shadowy, barely present when alive and are often presented *post-mortem.*[14] It is clear that Lê aspires to a form of subversion and innovation which transcends conceptions or categories of identity, and she has said of French language and culture, 'parce que je ne m'inscris dans aucune tradition, je peux me comporter devant cette langue comme un hérétique face à une idole, la ressusciter, l'inventer, être son pygmalion' (Argand: 1999). This may sound Bhabhian, but we realise it is more an effort to liberate the author and her texts from the shackles of *any* national identity, *couper les amarres,* to float off to an *ailleurs* or an *au-delà* beyond all national or geographic boundaries. We might consider that the universal dimension she describes aspiring to, in the interviews referred to earlier, is another reflection of her way of using writing as a means to escape fixity, nationality and belonging: 'Écrire, c'est s'exiler' (Argand 1999).

As we have seen, Lê's status as *exilée* has become central to her identity as an author, and she encourages this image. Her exile has evolved from an involuntary physical, geographical migration to a voluntary psychic isolation within the same geographical space.[15] She cultivates an intellectually-constructed exile in the relatively rare interviews given to critics and academics over the years (even more rarely to the media), and sees herself as *apatride* or nation-less, similar to a number of her central characters. Lê repeatedly rejects the Francophone label, insisting in personal conversations as far back as the early 1990s that 'she does not consider herself a Vietnamese francophone writer' (Yeager 1997, 257). She appears at that stage willing to accept the position of 'linguistic citizenship' in France. This citizenship is nonetheless then greatly qualified by her own constant identification as *métèque,* and this pejorative term for foreigner appears frequently in Lê's texts and interviews: 'Je me sens comme un métèque écrivant en français. Je dis métèque avec beaucoup d'orgeuil. Je suis une étrangère au monde, au réel, à la vie, au pays dans lequel je vis, à mon propre pays' (Argand 1999). There is a tangible sense of pride in this statement, in the fact that her immigrant, exilic position facilitates her resistance to integration or assimilation. The circumstances of her national otherness have enabled her to cultivate intellectual and linguistic otherness. Her

[14] This is true also of her recent novel *Lame de fond* (2012: top four shortlist for Prix Goncourt 2012) where the opening narrator, Van, is a character speaking from beyond the grave.

[15] Kate Averis sees Lê as 'positively appropriating the space of marginality and alienation' to create 'a transient, nomadic sense of belonging' (2011, 187), though it is perhaps more 'non-appartenance'; McIlvanney also states that, 'She appears to consciously desire the feeling of exclusion, not solely in a gesture of postcolonial dissent, refusing to accept the identity of the "liberator", but [...] in a more generally metaphysical manner' (2009, 384).

linguistic disposition is that of a sort of disobedient adopted child, carrying the name but not the blood of her adopted family, and for much of her career her identity has been predicated on the refusal to belong to the dominant French culture.

This stance, however, appears to have become less trenchant over time. In 2007, she says Vietnam's perpetual presence within her allows her to feel 'toujours étrangère, partout où je suis' *but* acknowledges that, 'Le français est ma langue, le territoire dans lequel j'évolue', and we may detect at this point in her career a sign of acceptance, a sort of settling in as she acknowledges: 'si je suis géographiquement une exilée, culturellement je suis ancrée dans la civilisation occidentale' (Loucif 882; 891). This recognises the Frenchness of her texts, and the overwhelmingly occidental influences, sources and intertexts ubiquitous in her corpus.[16] The Greek legends of Antigone, Kronos, The Three Fates, Ariane's Thread as well as Shakespeare's *King Lear*, are some central examples among many others. In interviews she cites as influences French and European writers including Kafka, Nietzsche, Cioran, Bachmann, Flaubert. However, she insists on her individualist identity, saying of France, 'J'y habite, mais tout mon travail a consisté à trouver une langue personnelle, une langue dans laquelle je peux récréer des parts d'enfance' (Loucif 2007, 884).[17] Also, the overt absence of Vietnamese culture does not mean that it is not an important influence. We might conclude that, for Lê, Vietnam is an internalized Imaginary, while France is a resisted Symbolic. Ultimately, nationality and any strictures of identity which risk pinning her down are anathema to Lê, for whom, as we have seen, writing is a way to *escape* concrete identity rather than fix it, and represents the only true 'home'. As she has recently remarked:

> Le sentiment d'être en porte-à-faux ne me quitte jamais. Comme je l'ai souvent dit et écrit, j'ai un fort sentiment de non-appartenance, à quelque communauté que ce soit. Citoyenne de la langue française? Je dirais plutôt maintenant que *seule la littérature a représenté pour moi un point d'ancrage, une sorte de port d'attache* [...] on n'écrit pas pour être un poète allemand, russe, français, francophone, mais pour être TOUT et *abolir les frontières.* (Personal interview 2012; my emphasis; original capitalisation)

[16] Barnes also observes that Lê 'shares neither the cultural values nor the literary preoccupations of her so-called ancestors. She does not feel obliged to explain a culture she hardly knows, nor does she even claim the great writers of this tradition – Pham Duy Khiem (1908-1974) or Pham Van Ky (1916-), for example – as her influences. Rather Lê is quick to name writers such as Friedrich Hölderlin, Gérard de Nerval, and Antonin Artaud as her literary forefathers' (2007, 129). However, as we shall see, this may be overly dismissive.

[17] This mission to inaugurate a 'new' personal language is reflected in the idiosyncratic names of several of her female protagonists who are also *femmes de lettres*: Sola; Una; Forever, stressing perpetual uniqueness.

Yet for all that she protests, Linda Lê *is* part of French national culture so long as she writes and publishes there, and increasingly so, in fact, as she accumulates literary prizes and accolades. While she may have her sights set beyond borders on a supranational utopia/atopia and feels at home only in writing, her feet and her texts find their support firmly in the fertile soil of French culture. Her displaced literature is finding its place in the French literary scene, and inscribing itself – whether Lê likes it or not (and we suspect she might, whatever her professed indifference) – in a tradition from which it draws and into which it feeds.[18] Her categorical refusal of categories of identity extends to the question of gender, and she insists that, 'Je me considère avant tout comme un écrivain, sans distinction de sexe' (Personal Interview 2012). Nonetheless, there is great significance to be drawn from the treatment of her gendered characters, however androgynous she attempts to make them, and the critical tendency to be overly respectful of Lê's desire for writerly androgyny, combined with the postcolonial focus mentioned above, has tended to obscure some fascinating aspects of her work. Gender is at the heart of my analysis of Lê's writing, and I will deal explicitly with the issues of gender hybridity, androgyny and hermaphroditism in the next chapter.

In one of her most recent interviews, Lê describes the aims and vision of her writing project, renewed with each text she writes, as 'migrer vers de nouveaux espaces [...] je suis toujours en quête de ce qui m'est encore inconnu' (Schwerdtner 2013, 5). Lê's writing is a journey 'au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau', and we can easily detect her identification with many of her central characters, whom she describes as 'aventuriers de l'absolu' (Schwerdtner, 6).[19] The journey is not *to* a particular destination, but always a pioneering journey into the unknown *au-delà*, at the risk of losing the way and the self, and it is not the destination but the journey that is most important. Lê's texts are often marked by very open-ended endings, and the gaze of the reader is drawn beyond the borders of the diegetic universe to...we know not where exactly. It is this perilous nomadism that leads Michèle Bacholle-Bošković, in the first monograph on Lê's work, to characterise her writing as

[18] During our meeting in person in October 2013, Lê responded with something of a shrug to questions about what her literary prizes and success meant to her, stating that 'le succès, ça se passe en dehors de moi'.

[19] Lê borrows Baudelaire's closing line from his nightmarish poem, *Le Voyage* as the title for her recent non-fiction homage to the troubled, mad or suicidal authors who particularly inspired her adult literary development (2009).

both 'désengluant' and a method of 'déterritorialisation' in the deleuzo-guattarian sense (2006, 35-6; 37). The female protagonist of the early *Calomnies* (1993), for example, leaves closed an envelope containing the secret of her parentage, therefore leaving open the question of her il/legitimacy, and physically leaves the narrative with the words, 'Je m'en vais' (*Calomnies*, 181). *Apatride* or nation-less characters recur in the corpus, such as the female protagonist of *In memoriam*. *Voix* closes with the narrator moving ever further beyond the sphere of urbanised human society to a remote, distant and isolated spot in the mountains, and it is only here that she achieves a somewhat ambivalent feeling of peace and well-being. Similarly, in *Conte de l'amour bifrons,* which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Five, the 'oiseau de mauvais augure' repeatedly enjoins the narrating author of the text-within-the-text: *'va tu ne sais où et rapporte tu ne sais quoi'* (2005; original emphasis) and at the end the central male protagonist Ivan departs all shores to take to a life at sea, literally beyond borders. Crucially, we can never follow the characters on this journey. Madness is a further means of achieving a-positionality, refusing a position in logic, in the social, in the Symbolic order, and another journey that is by definition *idios* or away from others. Suicide represents another solitary journey into a beyond, and this is the destination to which Lê's later texts take us, as we shall see.

This elsewhere-beyond-here-and-now-that-is-nowhere of Lê's breeds a cult of *non*-being that feeds into her characters and her style. She produces immaterial and spectral characters in a *chiaroscuro* landscape recalling the Tenebrism of Renaissance painter Caravaggio, alternating between extremes of dark and light, black and white, death and ghostly life, with little intermediate value or fleshy colour (other than blood-red and ink-blue) to vivify either her landscape or her ghosts and bring them closer to the humdrum chaos of her readers' worlds. Lê describes her skeletal *écriture* as pared back to the bones, 'je supprime beaucoup, pour ne laisser que l'os' (Loucif 2007, 884). That is not to say that her writing is minimalist in the sense of Hemingway's or Ernaux's clipped prose, or that her characters lack complexity or that plot is simplistic – quite the opposite. Lê often presents a spectral universe of characters oscillating between life and death, as the living are ghostly and the dead are re-vivified, hauntingly re-living the narratives. The narrative universe created by Lê's pen is variously dystopic, atopic, or utopic – and thus veers respectively between the nightmarish, the

nowhere and the idealistic. But to what extent are her texts *topic* or topical?[20] Exactly what does the Lêian *au-delà* represent and to what extent can this a-positionality offer a solid foundation for the kind of subversion or transgression the author frequently alludes to? Can a mad ever-vanishing, suicidal (or in fact already dead) spectre inhabiting a nowhere beyond all reach offer a material figure of resistance?

I have placed considerable emphasis in previous chapters on the links between poetic language and the trope of madness as a linguistic tool of (feminist) resistance to normative masculinist logic, or phallogocentrism, in the writing of Emma Santos, for example, through the lens of Kristeva's *La Révolution du langage poétique*. Linda Lê's writing is powerfully lyrical, but in quite a more muted, elegant way than that of Santos, where poetry overwhelms meaning at times. Lê's lines often slip into rhythmic cadence and rhymes appear within sentences or paragraphs. Yeager points out how Lê deviates from the contemporary narrative norm with her voice inflected and enriched by poetry, the privileged literary form in her native Vietnam (1997, 256). Lê's narratives largely retain coherence and general narrative progression, even when that progression deviates and folds back on itself. Her writing does not mimic the non-sense of madness as Santos does, but it does often engage in grammatical and punctuational transgressions.

Lê's writing could be seen to fall into the third 'time' or 'generation' of Kristeva's essay *Women's Time* (1986). There Kristeva traces the shifts in attitude among European feminisms in their relation to 'linear time' (i.e. the chronological progression of history and also of language 'considered as the enunciation of sentences' [1986, 192]). This trajectory begins with what she calls existentialist feminism (i.e. Beauvoirean feminism) which *seeks to inscribe itself into linear time or history through 'a logic of identification* with certain values' (1986, 193-4; original emphasis). This cedes to 'younger women who came to feminism after May 1968' and 'had an aesthetic or psychoanalytic experience' (among whom we can certainly include Emma Santos), and Kristeva posits that 'by demanding recognition of an irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex, and, as such, exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way non-identical, *this feminism situates itself outside the linear time of identities*' (ibid., 194; my emphasis) and is marked by circularity, and, being 'monumental' (i.e. eternal), is almost a-temporal. What I have highlighted with italics here is how we might see the relation of these writers, and their

[20] We shall see in Chapter Five that there is a shift from the atopic/utopic to the topical in Lê's very recent works, though still inflected by spectral other-worldliness.

strands of feminism, to normative discourse or mainstream patriarchal culture. Beauvoir identifies with the masculine norm to find her place; Santos resists through a refusal (or failure) of identification and remains 'outside time' as the outlaw she describes in her texts. The 'third time' or generation, for Kristeva, is a combination of the two, 'insertion into history *and* the radical refusal of the subjective limitations imposed by this history's time' that Kristeva sees as having 'broken loose' in France in the 1980s (1986, 195). We could identify Lê as a 'third generation' in these terms, with her recourse to both mainstream and mythical sources, infused with her own blend of the personal and the spectral - the personal being anchored in or produced by its time of being, and the mythic and spectral elevating that being to an eternal dimension refusing the restrictions of the time of the lived and contingent life.

Lê manages to combine circularity, cyclical repetition and bursts of the anachronic and eternal with a clear narrative progression in a style that may be described as *cursive*. The looping flow of her narrative frequently folds back on itself, dipping deep into the past of her characters' lives before returning to the narrative present, then swoops out of the past through the present to move forward into the future, similar to the form and pattern of handwriting, which is in fact the physical form of Lê's writing for most of her corpus, as, until very recently, she wrote all of her texts by hand before typing them up.[21] Sabine Loucif describes it as 'l'écriture en spirale' (2007, 883), yet Lê's narrative 'line' does not simply spiral inwards onto itself, but also loops forwards. It is neither entirely cyclical, nor strictly linear, and ultimately her *écriture* is a cursive hybrid of prose and poetry, of the linear and circular, and in this way also can be seen as the hybrid 'third generation' described by Kristeva. This hybridity is amplified as her corpus develops and is symbolised in a certain hermaphroditism on the level of character, plot and style.

Remuer le couteau (de l'écriture) dans la plaie (de la folie)

While exile and her post-colonial background have tended to dominate the critical reception of Lê's work, in her writing there is no escaping the dominance of madness, itself linked

[21] She reports to Selao in 2002 not owning a computer at the time of writing *Les Trois Parques* and states in the Loucif interview, 'J'aime écrire à la main, ensuite je tape à la machine' and that it would be unthinkable to write directly on a computer (Selao 2011, 190; Loucif 2007, 883). This practice has now changed, and in our 2013 meeting Lê revealed that, 'Depuis deux ou trois ans je suis passée à l'ordinateur. Je suis passé radicalement de l'antiquité à la modernité'.

frequently to exile, as her narrator states in *Le Complexe de Caliban* (2005), 'L'histoire de mon âme est celle de l'exil, du deuil et de la folie qui les accompagne' (86). Lê herself remarks, 'Le thème de la folie m'a toujours hantée' (Loucif 2007, 885).[22] On the extra-diegetic level, madness is a source of creativity for Lê, and she openly acknowledges that the crisis at the heart of *Voix* and *Lettre morte* in particular is drawn from her own experience of mental breakdown and hospitalisation following the death of her father in 1995, an experience that also reappears much later in *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas*.[23] On the diegetic level, madness and the twin thematic of suicide are woven again and again into her narratives from her earliest works onwards, frequently through minor characters such as the 'oncle fou' in *Calomnies* and *Lettre morte*, or the twin brother in *Les Trois Parques* of whom La Manchote insists repeatedly 'iln'estpasfou' (sic), but who is nonetheless exiled to the asylum. Of primary concern to this study are the texts in which madness is gendered female and central protagonists or narrators (also almost always writers and usually female) suffer some form of madness in the broadest sense – as in *Voix*; *Lettre morte*; *Conte de l'amour bifrons*; *In memoriam* – or through the presence of the asylum or mental hospital, revisited in *Voix*; *Conte* and *À l'enfant*. This trope of madness will be fully explored in these two chapters on Lê, but before engaging in-depth with the diegetic madness, it is important to consider the relation of madness to writing for Lê as an author.

We might be drawn to see writing for Lê as a way to deal with madness, a sort of scriptotherapy or a means of working through and getting over mental illness and trauma. Lê's own statements on the relationship between writing and madness indicate the contrary, 'je ne crois pas en la vertu thérapeutique de l'écriture [...] l'écriture légitime la maladie au lieu de la réduire' (Loucif 2007, 883). More recently she repeats

> Je n'ai aucun romantisme de la folie [...] écrire n'aide pas à guérir, ce n'est pas une thérapie, car le mal selon moi va en s'aggravant, puisqu'*on remue le couteau dans la plaie*, puisqu'on revient sans cesse sur ce qui vous blesse, vous désoriente, vous jette hors de vos repères. (Personal interview 2012; my emphasis)

[22] She also avows a fascination with 'les écrivains fous' or those whose writing is driven by the fear of going mad, such as Hölderlin, Nerval, Artaud (Argand 1999), as well as Breton and Bachmann in other interviews.
[23] Lê describes suffering from hallucinations, suicidal thoughts, paranoïa and going weeks without speaking (Argand 1999).

Writing twists the knife in the wound, or as Kathryn Robson puts it, 'Narratives of trauma emerge from the wound, from a time between injury and healing [...] Writing, in this formulation, is not akin to healing; writing finds its roots in the open wound rather than the closed scar' (2004, 28). Yet while writing may not cure or heal, and is not seen as a form of therapy, for Lê it nonetheless represents a means of salvation or self-preservation, 'Les livres, les miens comme ceux des autres, m'ont sauvée. J'ai toujours une conception de l'écriture salvatrice' (Loucif, 892). Recently she describes writing almost in terms of the sublimation of the death drive, when she says that she writes often

> sur le désir de mort, avec cet espoir insensé qu'en écrivant je triompherai de la mort, que je viendrai à (sic) bout du néant qui me guette, qu'en inventant des personnages qui ferraillent avec la mort, je donnerai un sens à mon aventure terrestre [...] qu'est-ce que la littérature si elle ne signifie pas braver perpétuellement le danger qu'il y a à tout révoquer en doute? (Schwerdtner 2013, 314)

This sublimational process she describes helps to illuminate our reading of her dark, suicidal subject matter, and we will return to this in Chapter Five's focus on the suicide thematics. Lê's faith in the salvational capacity of writing was tested, and foundered, in the period of crisis following her father's death, of which she says in 1999, 'J'ai éprouvé une crise quasi mystique, une crise violente où je ne croyais plus au pouvoir de la littérature, à la capacité qu'elle a de sauver [...] Pour la première fois, j'avais le sentiment que les mots ne me sauvaient plus' (Argand 1999). Significantly, what she *does* ascribe her recovery to is the oral speech of other women, and not the written word, and this is attested to in the valorisation of the oral chorus of women in the asylum in *Voix*. Lê says that for her language returned

> Après une hospitalisation où j'étais devenue la spectatrice de la folie des autres, une folie très parlante puisque les femmes qui étaient là, avec moi, s'exprimaient beaucoup. Étrangement, la parole, la voix, m'est revenue à travers ce que j'entendais de la parole désaxée des autres. C'est la déraison qui m'a fait retrouver la raison. (Argand 1999)[24]

[24] Lê writes elegantly of this restorative female experience again in *À l'enfant*, 'nous flânions mains dans la main [...] à l'abri des réalités [...] nous nous susurrions des secrets' (58).

If writing cannot cure the subject of madness, and may at times be inadequate to save the subject from madness, nevertheless madness can enrich the literary project, or rather the madman (or woman) can imbue the text with a Diderotian *folie savante* akin to the *Neveu de Rameau*. Lê states, 'Le fou peut être clairvoyant. Le fou est aussi celui qui profère des paroles en apparence insensées mais qui peuvent toucher un nerf à vif' (Loucif 2007, 885).

We might consider that language and writing may represent either a fetish or a means of sublimation for the author – or indeed both at the same time. For Emma Santos, we saw in Chapter Three how language operated as a fetish produced and grasped as part of a terrified attempt by the narrator to save herself (and possibly the author also), a fetish which repeatedly failed. However, Linda Lê presents less a fetishistic relationship with language, than a relationship of sublimation. If we consider that the fetish prizes the *product* of writing, the artefact or material production of writing, with sublimation it is rather the *process* that is most important – even though for the readers or receivers of this sublimation the sublime product may become a cultural prize and consequently fetishised. Very often the lines dividing fetish from sublimation are blurred, and they may operate in parallel, as writing is often over-determined. For academics and literary critics, for example, there is a sublimating process involved in the analysis, deconstruction and interpretation of the cultural product which becomes fetishised in the process. The search for knowledge, for meaning, for truth at the heart of academic inquiry is arguably a fetishisation of the product of the sublimation process, but also itself a sublimating enterprise. The fetish is that which obscures the void and meaningless-ness of death, or Lacan's Real. It shields the reality of castration, and consequently of our inevitable mortality, from view, whereas the sublime is that which results from staring boldly into the void and speaking either of what is seen, or speaking from the place of that sight.

Lê's writing project drives itself 'au fond de l'inconnu' to confront what is there, as well as confronting the desire for death and the fear of madness she has felt haunted by since childhood. It is above all the *act* of writing, the process, which has primacy and potency for her:

> Quand j'écris, il me semble que je tente toujours de réparer cette discorde essentielle, entre moi et le monde. Quand je n'écris pas, la culpabilité revient et m'étouffe [...] Je me

> sens exister seulement quand j'écris. Dès que je me lève de ma table, le monde me paraît obscur, une énigme que je résous en créant. (Loucif 2007, 883)

This is evident in her narrative treatment of writing. The narrator of *In memoriam* declares in the opening line, 'Je serais devenu fou si je n'avais pas écrit ce livre' (7), and he writes in a desperate attempt at self-preservation in response to the unbearable loss of Sola (Averis 2011, 220). However, as Kate Averis points out, Sola's suicide makes the narrator and the reader doubt literature as 'une planche de salut' (IM, 8). Sola writes, unlike the narrator, not to 'work through' her crisis, but as an end in itself, and 'the primacy of the *process* of writing over the completed product is underlined' (Averis, 220) in Lê's work here as elsewhere. This is revelatory of an *écriture de jouissance* and is accompanied by the ubiquitous act of burning or other destruction or displacement of manuscripts, letters, notes and other even small scraps of textual material in the corpus:

> Here Lê foregrounds writing as mode and process, rather than as a means to the production of literary works. This treatment of writing can be related to Lê's identarian project as a whole, where she is evidently more interested in identity as a process of configuring and expressing a sense of self, than arriving at a point where identity becomes fixed and static. (Averis 2011, 221)

To relate this to my earlier point about autogenography, we see why, for Lê at least, the writing process must continue incessantly, because once writing stops, identity ceases to evolve and only the constant rewriting of the self can prevent identarian fixity and stasis.

Madness in Lê's corpus frequently intersects with *errance*, reflecting the *désorientation* she relates to madness above, and this spatial metaphor problematizes the 'linguistic space' Yeager sees Lê creating within French culture. The term appears ubiquitously in Lê's texts, particularly in those featuring madness centrally, such as *Voix*, *Lettre morte*, and *Conte*, and as early as *Calomnies* the mad uncle and his niece are described as 'des âmes errantes' (Cal 173). The female narrator in *Lettre morte* states, 'J'erre dans un labyrinthe sombre' (10-11) and we are told of Ivan, the male protagonist in *Conte* at one point that, 'Commença une longue

période d'errance' (CAB 20).[25] The female narrator of *Lettre morte* describes errant wandering within her own home, as the uncanny ghost of the father haunts her flat, 'j'errais dans l'appartement' (LM 62), and the labyrinth that is a feature of Lê's writing style as well as a frequent reference within her corpus, provides the dislocating, disorienting path structuring this *errance.* It is used in relation to Lê's 'mad' characters and marks their madness as transgressive, or being out of place, but possessed of a 'truth' or other-worldly *savoir* that is misunderstood or overlooked.

Tracking the movement of the madwoman in Lê's texts and of the mad *femme de lettres* in particular, is revealing. In short, from *Les Trois Parques* Lê takes the mad female narrator/protagonist out of the kitchen, out of the asylum (*Voix*), to launch her into a terrified errant wandering that later sees her return to the bedroom haunted by the father (*Lettre morte*), then again to the asylum (*Conte*) where a failed coupling with a 'lost' male figure results in her embarking on another voyage of directionless wandering, only to return more recently to confinement (*In memoriam*, *Cronos*). At this later point, through rejecting attempts to re-confine the female figure domestically (in maternity) she winds up banished to exilic confinement, from which her only escape appears to be self-sacrifice and suicide. We then, in *À l'enfant*, arrive at the moment which appears to signal the end of this *errance*/confinement oscillation, through a confrontation with madness and the maternal that appears to produce some sense of genuine transcendence.

Rachel Bowlby's study on feminism, women's writing and psychoanalysis, *Still Crazy After all these Years* (1992), reminds us just how closely feminism is linked to both space and writing, the right/freedom to move into and around in a social space or the Symbolic order of language. In her chapter 'Women, walking, writing', Bowlby shows how recent movements in women's writing demonstrate a tension between the 'progressive' and the 'transgressive' tendencies, the former being women 'slowly putting past restrictions behind them, getting to stand on their own two feet and write what they want', while the latter case involves 'the description of formal structures of exclusion, whereby what does not go along with a norm defined as masculine is taken as disruptive of established spaces and in a certain sense feminine' (Bowlby 4). Linda Lê's writing clearly does not inhabit the neutral space of the straightforward and progressive, and is far easier to identify as transgressive (recalling

[25] Minor figures are also marked by this term, such as *Lettre morte*'s 'oncle fou' who goes begging 'comme un moine errant' (LM 71) and the mad pianist, '[elle] errait dans les rues à la recherche de son amour enfui' (LM 67).

Yeager's claims for her), but it could also be argued that the path her transgression takes may in fact also be regressive, as presented in many of these madness texts. Wandering can be a journey of discovery, of chance encounter, as it was for the Baudelairean *flâneur* and surrealists such as Breton, or a triumphantly progressive *and* transgressive retaking of ground as in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. However, this journey can either go wrong, or lead the subject astray, and the anxious *flâneuse* in *Voix* shows a *femme de lettres* whose transgression takes her to an isolated *au-delà*.

The Uncanny Anxiety in Spectral Madness

Positionality and *errance* are defining features of the crisis in *Voix*, which reveals the anxiety tearing apart the figure of the female author as she attempts to take up her social and Symbolic position. It is with reluctance that I read an anxiety of authorship in the work of a female author of such creative force as Linda Lê, author of over twenty texts to date. It would be easy to celebrate the prowess of her complex novels, as well as her impressive critical success, exemplified by the numerous literary prizes she has won, some rarely awarded to a woman author, including the Prix Fénéon 1997; the 2010 Prix Wepler; the 2011 Prix Renaudot Poche and a shortlisting for the most prestigious French literary award, the Prix Goncourt in 2012. It is important to examine the paradox of this success won by texts featuring mad, suicidal and troubled women (and women authors). The anxiety I read may be paradoxical, born of the reality of women's eventual, gradual emergence from a socially mute domestic/ated 'inside' that is 'outside' of language (in the sense of the production and control of linguistic, cultural and social norms) to a social 'outside' that is 'inside' language. This anxiety may be a symptom of the uncertainties that the burden of responsibility this linguistic coming out or linguistic birth produces. Linda Lê, a successful, prolific woman writer, does incredible violence to the *femme de lettres* in her corpus, as she is variously silenced, rendered insane, exiled, mutilated, almost killed, and finally killed off completely, as an Antigone who commits suicide or is condemned to death.

Lê's own entry into writing is marked by uncertainty. She began publishing aged just twenty-four, and her first work, *Un si tendre vampire* (1987) features one character passing off another's writing as his own, and in this way, she 'thematizes her entry into authorship as literary theft' (Yeager 1997, 258). She later disowned her first three texts as too strongly-

identified with French culture and language.[26] In other early novels, *Les Évangiles du crime* (1992) and *Calomnies* (1993), writing is often diegetically misappropriated, outright destroyed or somehow illegitimate, and illegitimacy of parentage or authorship is a leitmotif of the corpus. Bacholle-Bošković observes that, 'elle se définit par l'illégitimité et y cherche justement sa légitimité' (2006, 8). More pertinent still are the words of Lê herself, who closes the recent Schwerdtner interview by describing her 'impression d'être une éternelle étrangère et de vivre cette vie en étant habitée par un sentiment *d'inquiétante étrangeté'* (2013, 317; my emphasis). This strong Lêian sense of illegitimacy, of unsettling strangeness or as it is otherwise known, of the uncanny, brings us to the uncanny crisis in *Voix*.

While clearly tied to grief and guilt for the father, *Voix* is also rooted in a severe linguistic crisis, and has been described as an 'état zéro' of signifying speech, where 'le texte met en scène un effondrement complet de la parole, devenue folle' (Cousseau 2002, 202-3). This 'ground zero' of language manifests in an uncanny crisis which according to Freud takes us back to the hinge-moment of insertion into or desertion from language, or castration. The *acéphale*, the female figure cut off from cerebral function and losing her head in madness, prominent in Santos' work, reappears in Lê's. Cixous' short story, 'Le Sexe ou la tête' is a pertinent reference. A Chinese emperor tries to make soldiers of his many wives, and his general's initial efforts to get the women to march in time are met with giggles and disarray. However, after he has punished the emperor's two favourite wives by chopping off their heads, the others march in line, and in silence. Ward-Jouve, commenting on this *conte*, observes, 'Women have been threatened with either decapitation or castration (have had their heads or their tongues, their sex, metaphorically chopped off), if they did not endorse the masculine Order' (1990, 132). Cixous' tale underlines how connected this *acéphale* figure is with the silencing of women's language, or an anxiety relating thereto. In *Voix* this punishment, this castration, appears to be self-inflicted by the female narrator, where it is extended to include the hand, the producer of writing both metaphoric and literal, particularly for Lê.

[26] See Yeager for Lê's views on their lack of the individual voice she strives for later (1997, 258).

The fantastic mode recognised by Sabine Loucif in *Les Trois Parques* intensifies in *Voix*.[27] The novel opens with the first-person female narrator – a woman author – in the atopic nowhere of a mental asylum, and the very first lines install the sense of *dépaysement* pertaining to this imprisoning but protective space, 'Je suis assise sur le banc d'un long corridor éclairé par des néons. Je ne sais pas où je suis' (V 7; 'je ne sais pas où je suis' is repeated several times in the opening pages). Similar to Emma Santos's corpus, in the linguistic womb of the asylum, language has broken down and the narrator declares, 'ma tête résonne de fragments de phrases' (V 14). Form follows content and this fragmentation is a feature of the novel itself, structured around typographical gaps. The language of the text itself breaks into fragments, and many pages bear very short passages, as little as three lines in places, the sparse black print surrounded by blank whiteness, highlighting the presence and power of silence. The style and structure here are strikingly different from Lê's more usual dense, compacted narratives frequently crammed with long, wordy and elegantly-constructed sentences and long passages of text offering little respite to the reader; and *Voix* stands out in the trilogy between the logorrhoea of *Les Trois Parques* and the verbal density of *Lettre morte*. *Voix* has several layers of fragmentation mirroring each other: the decomposition of language *in* the diegesis, reflecting the collapse of the narrator's subjectivity, and the decomposition of the language *of* the diegesis, as well as the physical decomposition of the narrator's own corporeality.

The narrator is surrounded by mainly female patients, whose voices intersect to create a mad chorus of destabilised subjectivity. Of seven other patients featured in the asylum section, six are women, and it is chiefly their voices that repeat themselves and overlay each other's and the narrator's so that we are often unsure who is speaking at a given moment – their voices are 'inextricablement imbriqués les uns dans les autres' (Cousseau 2002, 202).[28] This effect is produced by the typographic presentation of the dialogue, with no punctuation to indicate the opening of dialogue or reported speech, so there is a barely-detectable slippage of the *Je* narration into the speech of the other women. The result is a polyvocal chorus of anonymous and mutually-implicated femininity. This produces confusion and some

[27] In her study of the fantastic in women's writing, Margaret-Anne Hutton asserts that 'the fantastic is mobilized to explore the concepts of identity and origins' (2009, 2) and we may conclude that Lê's use of the fantastic explores linguistic origins.

[28] This recalls Lê's reference to her recovery from depression being largely due to the women's voices around her in the asylum, as we have seen.

frustration, and sends the reader back to re-read and disentangle, from a closer reading of clues and context, the various characters' stories and statements from one another. One conclusion that may be drawn is that in a way these women are one and the same figure, either in the personal sense that they are various 'faces' reflecting 'facets' of their 'decomposed' author, but also on a more political level they may represent a shared experience of different, diverse women who are depersonalised and treated indifferently by the medical profession in the first instance, and society in general.

This 'mad sorority' is united in its social exclusion and isolation, becoming 'one' in their exile from 'others'. They display mutual empathy and share confidences, revealing their most intimate psychic and emotional wounds, through a disjointed and seemingly mad discourse that represents their individual mad truths. This womb-like and unstable, but relatively gentle, collective contrasts radically with the terror, paranoia and bloody violence of the following sections of the text, which all take place outside the asylum, back in the 'real' world. Although there is refuge, and some degree of reassurance in this sororal space, as one patient, the 'femme au chapeau d'homme', insists, 'On est en prison ici, On devient fou, il y a des mauvaises influences' (V 7-8; original punctuation). The asylum is ultimately a protective but paternalistic and confining locus for the women, imprisoned, punished, separated and segregated from the world. 'On' is of course the depersonalizing, defeminizing pronoun, and the verb and tense of this 'on devient fou' are interesting, as they suggest that it is here that one *becomes* mad, as opposed to being placed there because one was already mad. Transgressive punctuation recurs throughout the text, and may be identified with the transgressive politics of the content. The narrative is not paced or spaced conventionally, there is little formal punctuation and the passages of text appearing between the blank spaces are dense and intense, giving the sense of bursts of logorrhoeic delirium punctuated by lengthy pauses of very pregnant silence.

Given its title, it is not surprising that *Voix* is a highly sonorous text. The 'voix' draw from two antithetical aural registers: the female chorus inside the asylum, and the brutal cacophony of the narrator's delirium and the 'Organisation' outside the asylum, in her apartment, and on the streets of Paris. The asylum resonates with a constant murmur of oral output, such as the 'philosophe' who mutters quietly, or Sidonie who sings a perpetual refrain, and among the other women, 'l'une braille, l'autre vocifère' (V 9). The language here is poetic at times, with internal rhyme and rhythm, for example in the line describing the spy satellites

born of the paranoia of the only male patient, 'l'Oeil invisible qui enregistre chacun de nos gestes, l'Oreille ultra-sensible qui écoute chacun de nos soupirs' (15). These hyperbolic organs of sensory perception are uncanny or fantasmatic metonymies of the asylum's structure of authority, a constant controlling surveillance over the patients, that serve as proxies for the Organisation, and may also symbolize the neurological points of entry of the social/Symbolic into the individual's unconscious where it establishes the superego, the agent of the outside on the psychic inside. The choral effect of the women's voices transforms the poetic language structurally into something more akin to a song, with shreds of dialogue reprised like a chorus, just as 'Sidonie-a-plus-d'un-amant chante toujours le même refrain' (V 10).

This choral harmony of female human voices is overwhelmed in the narrative once the narrator moves outside the asylum, by the starkly contrasting and brutally discordant cacophony of hideous deafening sounds and auditory hallucinations, gendered masculine. Here Lê's tone is, as Yeager describes, 'at once cruel, violent and mortifying' (2006, Foreword, ii). The mortifying sounds include the agents of the Organisation; also the mechanized din of an engine that roars around the narrator increasingly insistently throughout these later sections; a pack of howling hounds hunting the narrator that is described as 'la meute' (evoking l'émeute) or 'la horde de l'enfer sonne l'hallali' (V 29). In the midst of this din, the narrator is now a lone voice, muted and mostly completely silenced – although she has escaped the social exclusion of the asylum she is even more isolated on the outside, having lost the sonorous and sororal chorus of support. She tries to appeal to her dead father for help, but cannot make herself heard, 'J'appelle mon père au secours. Mais aucun son ne sort de ma bouche' (30), and communication is impossible. The woman wants to speak and be heard, but has no voice. We are reminded of Santos' 'cri écrit', the screaming cry from the bowels of a semiotic silence as the narrator describes 'ces voix épouvantables qui hurlent et que personne n'entend' (V 25). The latter line closely echoes one from *Les Trois Parques*, 'cette voix épouvantable qu'on appelle ordinairement le silence' (LTP 249). These terrible voices from the *Voix* quotation may refer to the voices inside the narrator's head that only she hears. If 'no-one hears' ('personne n'entend') but she hears, then she is no-one, evoking the narrator's a-subjectivity, as well as the sense that no-one *else* hears these voices in her head, in the singularity, the *idios*, of her social experience. The voices may also, in light of the latter line from *Les Trois Parques*, connote the dark voices of the semiotic and the drives, linked in Kristevan psychoanalytic terms to the maternal and to death. Either way, the 'voix' of the

sections outside the asylum are voices compelling the narrator to destroy herself and her texts.

The narrator moves from the atopic space of the asylum back *outside* to re-enter a dystopic social and symbolic order. A sense of errant disorientation persists, similar to the dis-locating oscillation of inside/outside seen in Santos. However, despite her apparently psychotic delirium, the narrator now recognises specific indices of place, shared with the reader, placing her mainly in Paris, in her own apartment and then on the city's streets. Later the movement becomes erratic and ranges from metropolitan France to an airport (a nowhere between destinations) to an imagined return to her (unnamed) home country. We therefore have an antithesis between on the one hand the atopic disorientation of the asylum, where the narrator appears to claim to be sane ('On devient fou') and where other characters appear to have a real and fleshly existence, and on the other hand, the realistic geographically-grounded but dystopic orientation of the world outside, where other characters appear largely born of, or warped by, the narrator's delirium. The use of the present tense throughout the text underscores the sense for the reader of accompanying the narrator on her delirious voyage, and there is a high degree of movement and sudden, disorienting transition from one place to another without much, if any, explanation.

The errant female treading the streets, greeted by a deafening din, recalls Baudelaire's poem *À une passante* and in particular the opening line, 'La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait/Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse, Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse/Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet' (Baudelaire 1999, 177-8). To return to Bowlby's study on women, movement and language, she points out how the *flâneur*, deeply connected to the literary (and therefore to both the social space and the Symbolic realm of cultural production), was exclusively male and the 'femme passante' the essential object of his gaze, and we saw in Chapter Three how Breton's surrealist twist on the flâneur/passante in the 'chance encounter' was reworked by Emma Santos in *Effraction au Réel* (Bowlby 1992, Ch.1).[29] The woman's place historically, traditionally, literarily (as well as literally) was not in the social space:

[29] Bowlby draws from the study by Louis Huart, *Le Flâneur* (1850); see also Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible *flâneuse*' (1985).

> For the woman in the street is no neutral opposite or complementary number to that figure for sociological average-ness, the man in the street. First of all, the woman occupying this place – in the phrase, on the road – reveals the bias of 'the man in the street' who was supposed to stand or speak for men and women at once. The second point follows from this: that the woman in the street is somehow out of place, at least out of *her* place, viewed primarily in terms of her sex. (1992, Introduction, vii)[30]

This is another expression of the cultural 'norm' placing men as subjects and agents of movement *and language*, while women are objects free to move only within the horizon of that male gaze:

> The walker is a writer; and what he notes, with his eyes and with his pen, is the woman. This woman cornered by pen or eye does not, at first sight, look like someone likely to take herself for either a *flâneur* or a writer. If she tried to *flâner* or to write, *she might be obliged to identify herself as a man, or at least not to look like a woman* (1992, 8; my emphasis)

I emphasize this last line, as it has significant resonance in relation to the evolution of Linda Lê's authorial identity and the dynamics of gender in her narratives, something I will expand on in the next chapter. Bowlby's insightful analysis shows how Virginia Woolf masterfully overturns this paradigmatic binary, and both satirises the *flâneur* and instantiates a *femme flâneuse*, particularly in the character of Clarissa Dalloway of *Mrs Dalloway* ('the woman who likes to dally along the way' [Bowlby, 16]) whose elegantly-painted breezy and confident outing to buy flowers – 'I love walking in London' (Woolf 1922, 5) – has etched a space of reverence in the literary canon.[31] Lê frees her 'passante' from the passivity and restriction of the asylum and the domestic, but *Voix's* narrator is in stark contrast to Clarissa Dalloway, and under Lê's pen she becomes a *folle flâneuse* or *flâneuse inquiète* (or *d'une étrangeté inquiétante*) who then exposes her anxiety at having made this cultural and ontological metamorphosis.

[30] We might think also of Beauvoir's existential binary of mobility - transcendence and immanence - central to *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

[31] Bowlby also observes that Woolf's seminal work on women and writing, *A Room of One's Own* (1928) 'all about the importance of an inside, personal space for the woman writer [...] is structured throughout by an imaginary ramble' that leads to the point of the woman writing – as though reclaiming the physical space were a necessary prerequisite for the progression to entry of the literary space (1992, 16).

On her anxious and uncanny adventure outside the asylum, the narrator's auditory and visual hallucinations conjure up her persecution by terrifying agents of a repressive superego or Symbolic authority, *L'Organisation*, which asserts itself as the only legitimate authority, and the representation is of a highly phallogocentric entity. The explicitly masculine-gendered agents remorselessly try to destroy the narrator and her writing. This hunting is accompanied by the narrator's haunting by her father's ghost. A nightmarish, deeply uncanny scene of spectral madness unfolds, and psychological fragmentation is mirrored by physical decomposition. Body parts are literally strewn across the pages. Not just any parts, though: the text brutalizes heads and hands, the physical points of contact between individuals, and the organs of speech and writing.

Before examining Lê's uncanny psychosis let me turn to Freud's 'Uncanny'. He states, 'Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist [...] all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when [...] they prove capable of independent action' ('The Uncanny' 1955, 244). The narrator of *Voix* is constantly pursued and persecuted by severed heads which attack her, 'les têtes coupées happent mes cheveux, me tirent en arrière' (V 39), and, with this pulling, they arrest her progression. Elsewhere they chase her, urging her to drown herself in the Seine, 'Des têtes coupées flottent sur l'eau, elles ouvrent la bouche, crient dans ma direction, Saute, saute donc' (21).[32] Later in her own home it is her own head that is severed when she looks at herself in the mirror, 'Au lieu de mon reflet, c'est une tête de noyée que j'y recontrais, une tête décapitée puis jetée dans la Seine' (V 51). These bodiless heads are an inversion of the 'monde sans tête' (14) viewed by the narrator through the barred window of her cell-like room in the hospital. Within, all she can see is a headless world without reason, without cerebral function and deprived of the means of speech, even though she herself retains these organs and functions inside.

Once outside she loses her head, and grotesque and murderous heads taunt and haunt her. At times these heads seem to merge with the Organisation's agents. On close examination of one nightmarishly gory scene (Voix 29) we see something very particular at work, as the severed heads become the morbid fruit of the narrator's womb. She is again harried to destroy herself, and describes herself in bed bathed in blood. On first glance this is

[32] Loucif, who sees the uncanny in operation in *Les Trois Parques*, describes the severed head as 'the motif "fantastique" par excellence' (2009, 125).

easily mistaken for another of the text's several suicide attempts, however, it may be in fact the delirious representation of a metaphoric miscarriage:

> Je suis recroquevillée dans mon lit. Les draps rougissent. Les voix me harcèlent. Je baigne dans une mare de sang que rejettent les têtes coupées qui s'entrechoquent, tendent leur bouche vers ma bouche, glissent le long de mon corps, entre mes jambes, comme *des fruits morbides que j'aurais enfantés dans mon sommeil.* (V 29; my emphasis)

The severed heads are putrefied fruit the narrator *would have* or *might have* birthed. Lê presents a horrific, bloody and intimate projection of a multiple miscarriage. This abjection of maternity becomes an increasingly dominant thematic for Lê and takes on greater significance in my reading of her later work.

The synecdoche of the mutilated hand in *Voix* expands the uncanny mutilation of the central character 'La Manchote' in *Les Trois Parques*, who has had her *writing hand* severed. This mutilation is ambivalently described by Lê in interviews as both a 'signe d'élection' (Loucif 2007, 890) and as a sign of culpability, 'La main amputée, c'est aussi la main *coupable'* (Interview cited in Bacholle-Bošković 2006, 93; my emphasis). The writing woman is both special, the 'chosen' one, and also culpable, in a paradox that goes to the heart of Lê's representation of the woman author. This hand-in-hand relationship of writing and guilt is handed on from *Les Trois Parques* to *Voix*. Initially, the narrator cuts the tendon of her left hand with broken glass, and this mutilated *main gauche* is opposed to the narrator's right hand, the 'main valide' (V 25) and so by implication the mutilation signals in-validity, a 'main *non*-valide'. The associations in French of 'droit' and 'gauche' are significant. 'Droit' is to be in the right, *il a droit*, whereas the 'gauche' is awkward, socially out of place and wrong in some way. The hand of authority opposes the hand which errs. Within the narrative the valid (right) hand destroys the in-valid one's writing, 'De ma main valide, je balai l'encrier, le manuscrit, dont les feuillets volent à travers la pièce. Je jette à terre la machine à écrire. Je renverse les piles de livres, mets à sac la bibliothèque' (V 25). This destruction of the narrator's own writing replays Lê's own traumatic experience of destroying her own manuscripts and exposes the complex and ambivalent relationship with her own authorship and authority as a writer.

Not only body parts but the narrator's entire physicality is under threat in *Voix*, and suicide, self-harm and sacrifice are *leitmotifs*. The various forms of attempted suicide or death evoked

include shooting, wrist-slitting, medical overdose, drowning, immolation, defenestration and crucifixion. Outside the prison-refuge of the hospital, the twin themes of suicide and sacrifice dominate the diegetic foreground. The attempted suicide is here not voluntary, but forced self-sacrifice (like the forced abortion in Santos), and each action of self-harm or attempted self-destruction occurs in the context of the narrator's victimisation by *l'Organisation*, 'L'Organisation exige un nouveau sacrifice' (V 25); 'il faut te détruire, me dit une voix' (29, 30) and 'Détruis-toi!' (30; 32).[33] The narrator feels hounded by this nameless, faceless entity of authority, along with its omnipresent and multiform agents. These agents at times appear as many-headed hounds, evoking the mythological figure of Cerberus, the hell-hound guarding the Styx to prevent any escape from Hades, the realm of the dead. This grotesque figure is itself an uncanny mutation of the domesticated dog, and its cerebral excess offers another antithesis to the headless narrator, deprived of intellectual resource. Suicide is presented in *amplificatio*, moving from the oblique reference above to a smallish hand-wound (potentially Christ-like stigmata) and culminating in a bloody slashing of wrists.

The narrator herself later lacerates both wrists, an act preceded by the statement, 'Un homme m'attend dans la rue, avec un couteau qu'il me plantera dans le dos. Je m'infligerai à moi-même la blessure' (V 32). She does the enemy's work for it. This can be seen as a resumption of self-determination, or self-possession in retaking control of one's own life, in the way Toni Morrison's *Beloved* describes how slaves would commit infanticide to deprive slave-masters of yet more lives to control. Although indisputable in its effect, however, this is perhaps the most negative and tragic 'escape' route open to the individual. In the context of the gender colonisation in *Voix,* punishment is fearfully self-inflicted as a result of external forces – but these 'external forces' are externalized productions, hallucinations, of the internal conflict within the narrator, and in a sense they are re-externalisations of internalised social forces, in the way the Freudian superego operates as the outside internal to the self, or the Lacanian Symbolic order (and *l'Autre*) function. The narrator imagines the satisfaction of the agents, 'les envoyés de l'Organisation riaient, heureux du sacrifice' (20).

[33] Note that the name and presentation of this Organisation recalls George Orwell's Big Brother, which in turn closely resembles the figure of 'Big Mother' described by Lê's narrator in *A l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* (2011), a name used by the narrator and her sisters in childhood for their mother due to her strict authoritarian parenting style. The ubiquitous identification of the mother with French society in Lê's work then supports a reading of this 'Organisation' as a symbolic/superego entity established by and/or representing French culture.

The thematic of martyrdom continues, as the narrator's *errance* through the city streets takes her to Montmartre, 'J'avance en aveugle sur mon chemin de croix' (22), and she anticipates being killed there, although when this does not eventuate, she believes it is only a temporary reprieve. The location is apposite, connoting the martyrdom performed there years before when it was the site of decapitation for evangelists during the Roman occupation, and it is also where the headless martyr St Denis came into being.[34] As always with Lê, the destruction of self is mirrored in the destruction of text, and the inextricable interdependence of self/text is particularly clear in the following crucial passage:

> Ils sont venus, ils ont lu le manuscrit laissé sur la table et maintenant, de retour dans l'appartement, j'entends leur rire qui résonne entre les murs, leurs sarcasmes qui fusent les coins les plus reculés. C'est donc à *ça* qu'elle occupe ses journées, Elle s'éreinte à tricoter une petite romance tire-larmes, Tu mens, petite princesse cloîtrée dans le temple Littérature, Tu files un conte minaudier, On va t'en faire voir, Tu écriras sur Nous [...] Joue donc un peu, Joue à la folie et à la mort, Brûle-toi les ailes, Brûle cette petite romance qui sent le roussi (V 24; original italics)

The tone is mocking, sarcastic and condescending regarding the traditionally feminine-gendered creative activities of knitting and writing romance novels. We notice the spatial invasion of 'ils', the agents of the symbolic, who have entered the narrator's personal domestic space, itself a clear metaphor for the psychic space. The woman writer hears voices telling her 'you will write about a masculine "Us"', presenting an injunction for the lone, isolated female author to confine herself to the material or subject matter focussed on and dictated by monologic masculine authority.[35] This is underscored by the homophonic metaphor in 'ailes', which phonetically recalls the plural feminine 'elles', thus allowing us to read the agents ordering the narrator to 'burn the girls' and destroy the plural feminine.[36]

This particular passage is also highlighted by Leslie Barnes, who, surprisingly, entirely overlooks the gender ramifications to focus on the cultural, racial and postcolonial implications. Barnes comments on the critical and media preoccupation with Lê's status as

[34] A more detailed description of the links between Montmartre, decapitation and sainthood can be found in Andrew Hussey's *Paris, the Secret History* (2007, 16-17).
[35] This 'Nous' reappears at the conclusion of *In memoriam*, which features the *fait accompli* of the suicide of a woman writer, and which I will discuss at length in the next chapter.
[36] I am indebted to Professor Anne Green, King's College London, for this insight.

'outsider or exiled author' and criticizes this 'overly reductive tendency' that 'sidelines the aesthetics of her literature' and insists, 'The point here is obviously not to denigrate her experiences as a Vietnamese immigrant in France; rather, the goal is to avoid limiting our understanding of Lê's work to these events' (2007, 130). However, Barnes' analysis of the passage and of Lê's writing remains limited exclusively to these parameters. She reads three possibilities for the 'Organisation' all drawn from the sphere of race or post-colonialism: dominant French culture; the (Vietnamese) diasporic community; the post-colonial literary market, and only very peremptorily mentions any gender element. This reflects the current tendency in French literary studies towards postcolonial and francophone discourses and away from feminist and gender matters, which have arguably fallen out of vogue.[37] Lê's attempted erasure of 'woman' in her own identity, as we have seen, produces a much-diminished focus on gender in studies of her work. The general thrust of Barnes' argument supports my analysis, albeit made in relation to an alternative alterity, the otherness of gender. For example, when commenting on the long quotation from *Voix* above, she says:

> an outside agent imposes the criteria of belonging and the definition of justified literary expression on the *immigrant* author. And this agent demands that the narrator conform to its own conceptions of "other", "author" and "authenticity". As such, the narrator is subject to hostile external forces that prohibit the successful articulation of her own agency. (2007, 134; my emphasis)

We might easily replace 'immigrant' with 'female' to reveal the gender politics dominating this text. There is in the quotation above from *Voix* a palpable sense of anxiety regarding female linguistic production and its reception. The narrator, following this passage, *does* burn her manuscript, and later hallucinates, 'Des lettres brillent au fond, voyelles mutilées, consonnes aux jambages arrachés' (V 47).[38] Letters and limbs are paralleled in their decomposition. It is not always evident in the text that there might be a redemptive aspect to this self-destruction, however the narrator states at one point, 'que la douleur me permette de me retrouver' (V 32) implying some aspiration to renaissance or self-(re)discovery.

[37] It is worth also remarking that the trend towards 'gender' studies over 'feminism', while it has many ideological advantages, in practice itself effaces the female/feminine specificity and removes the focus on women...once again.

[38] This textual destruction has earlier echoes in *Calomnies* (1993), also later in *Lettre morte* and *In memoriam* where the diegesis' female author destroys her own manuscripts.

It is worth here returning to Freud to explore other uncanny resonances in this context. In his 1919 essay, Freud highlights the following, *'Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light'*, using italics to emphasize this quality. He considers that its opposite, 'heimlich', the 'homely' is 'on the one hand [...] what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight' (Freud: 1955, 224-5). For many hundreds of years the female and the feminine were physically domesticated and 'kept out of sight'.[39] Women, *real* women or the realities of the lived experiences of the diverse range of 'women' (as opposed to the cultural ideal of 'woman') were long obscured in social life as in literature, enabling Lacan to state notoriously, 'il n'y a pas ~~La~~ femme' or as Woolf beautifully puts it in *A Room of One's Own*:

> All the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups are washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie. All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded. (1928, 89)

The asylum has also over the past two centuries in particular become a space of enclosure and obscuring where women have been 'secreted' for breaches of the homely-ness demanded of them in Western civilization.[40] In some ways, as we have seen in Chapter Three, the asylum puts women even further inside, inside a space firmly within the structures of power and the state, that paradoxically becomes a sort of 'outside-inside', a liminal space under state control (with doctors/psychiatrists as the agents of authority), but outside the social space, excluded from social communicability, in other words mute(d), and Santos' metonymy of the 'sparadrap' sealing up the psychiatric patient's mouth is again apposite. *Voix* is rent with the anxieties of the crisis occurring as the ('heimlich') female emerges into the Symbolic, and the uncanny effect this produces as that which 'ought to have remained...secret and hidden' comes to language.

Significantly, *Les Trois Parques*, the publication immediately preceding *Voix*, is a *huis clos*, presenting three female characters (two sisters and their cousin) carrying out a lengthy discussion about a distant father that takes place entirely in a hermetic domestic space, the

[39] Sophocles writes in the fifth century B.C., 'keep them within/ The proper place for women' in his presentation of female subversion, which we return to in Chapter Five (*Antigone* 1947, 142).
[40] See for example the chapter 'Domesticating Insanity' in Showalter's excellent study of the gender power dynamic at work in psychiatry from the eighteenth century, *The Female Malady* (1987).

kitchen of the 'maison flambant neuve' of the 'ventre rond' character, the older sister who is proudly pregnant and maternal.[41] The suffocated *heimlich* of this first text of the trilogy is then unleashed with uncanny ferocity in *Voix*. I partially repeat Bowlby's well-phrased observation, as it is so pertinent here: 'the woman in the street is somehow out of place, at least out of *her* place, viewed primarily in terms of her sex' (1992, Introduction, vii).[42] Bowlby highlights a lesser-known Woolf text that is illuminating here. The 1927 essay 'Street-Haunting: A London Adventure' in her *Collected Essays* reinforces the author's association between walking and writing, as the narrator leaves the house to buy a pencil, thus embarking on another movement towards writing. For Bowlby, the essay 'suggest[s] the connection between walking and writing' (1992, 28). I would add that a crucial element is also the mutuality of the exchange, for if the walk's purpose was the pencil, and thus the movement's aim was towards writing, the reciprocal implication is that writing facilitates (re-)entry into the social. Woolf's essay celebrates 'creative mobility' (Bowlby, ibid.), or put otherwise, 'Seule l'écriture semble capable, *jusqu'à un certain point*, de donner quelque direction aux personnages dérivants dans «l'ère du vide »' (Morello & Rodgers: 2002, 28; my emphasis). Writing can give direction. With *Voix*, however, this re-entry and this mobility are characterized by fear and anxiety, and we are brought to ask what 'certain point' Lê might be revealing, beyond which writing can no longer offer direction to a positive destination.

There is an interesting point of potential contact between Lê's uncanny and Bhabha's re-working of Freud's 'unhomely'. Bhabha evokes Franz Fanon's desire for the recognition of cultural presence to be a 'negating activity' as outlined in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986, 8), and sees this 'negating activity' as *unhomely*, as 'capturing something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations' (1994, 9). In this unhomely eruption, the 'borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting' (ibid.). For Bhabha, this unhomely state 'is a paradigmatic colonial and post-

[41] This is perhaps the *only* representation of a pregnancy that is welcomed and accepted by the pregnant woman in Lê's corpus. It is complicated by being presented as a consumerist accessory for the woman, and is contrasted with ventre rond's younger sister, belle gambettes, who carries an unwanted pregnancy she is intent on terminating.

[42] The expression 'faire les trottoirs' (prostitution) encompasses the inherent transgression of women on the streets.

colonial condition' (1994, 9), and significantly (and unlike Barnes) he also recognizes the gender aspect of this unhomely:

> By making visible the forgetting of the 'unhomely' moment in civil society, feminism specifies the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public which is now shadowed, or uncannily doubled, by the difference of genders which does not neatly map on to the private and the public, but becomes disturbingly supplementary to them. (1994, 10-11)

This helps us recognize how *Voix* performs a dissolution of the divide between home/world and domestic/social with the invasion of 'ils', the agents of the patriarchy, into the narrator's own physical and psychic space. The space-invading 'ils' here is replaced by the father's ghost in *Lettre morte,* making the narrator's domestic (and more intimately, the bedroom) space a house haunted by the (paternal) masculine. Bhabha teases out how this pull towards the unhomely, this seeking of the interstice in the breaking down of the binary of private/public or personal/social, is one gravitating the individual towards the social. In a discussion of Toni Morisson's *Beloved,* he writes, 'To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity: "I am looking for the join...I want to join...I want to join"' (1994, 18; citing *Beloved*). Might we read through this Bhabhian unhomeliness a home-sickness for a place in the social that Lê's narratives have sought to suppress, but cannot resist and is satisfied through her compulsive act(s) of publishing. Publishing is, after all, a deeply social act of out-reach, evincing a desire for solidarity and recognition and, despite her insistence to the contrary, Lê is not so isolated, other-worldly or exiled as she might fancy.

It might be possible to argue that the gender element here is merely coincidental or over-stated, and indeed Lê insists that 'Je ne m'interrogeais pas sur la place de la femme écrivain' (Personal Interview 2012). However, there is compelling evidence pointing to the contrary within the text itself. For example, the alternatives available to the hunted narrator as the means to escape persecution and sacrifice and take her 'off the streets', include the narrow range of opportunities traditionally confronting women, all characterised by enclosure in a 'heimlich' hidden space: the convent, the asylum, the domestic (with God, the Doctor, the

Father, repsectively, in authority) – all physical and discursive 'spaces' or practices shaping (training) and re(s)t(r)aining women. She considers entering a convent: 'J'irai au couvent, je serai enfermée à vie, je me raserai le crâne, je marcherai pieds nus. L'Organisation ne me lâchera qu'à ce prix' (V 52). There is a clear parallel drawn between the ascetic convent and criminal imprisonment, which again echoes the refrain 'On est en prison ici' of the 'inmates' of the asylum.[43] In the asylum, the narrator describes her feeling that the psychiatrists, 'ces Grands Inquisiteurs, les psychiatres' (very much echoing Santos) are determined to pacify her and to convince her that it is her own paranoid delirium that is creating the 'Organisation', which they tell her is 'née de mon délire' and they seek to 'm'endormir pour avoir la paix, car je connais leurs secrets, leurs crimes inavouables. Ils veulent que je me sacrifie, ils tentent d'étouffer ma voix, de bâillonner mes cris' (V 59). This presents another agency of authority bent on muting the sequestered female voice. Domestic enslavement, the third option that appears open to the narrator, involves being ground into poverty by housework, 'Je vivrai pauvrement, en faisant des ménages. Les envoyées de l'Organisation riront, heureux du sacrifice' (V 62). These elements point to an implicit inherent feminist politics at work here.

A contrasting trope to the above poetics of claustrophobia and imprisonment is the *petit oiseau* with its potential for the freedom of flight and song, but this figure, metaphoric of the female author, is also crushed and brutalised.[44] Lê's uncanny treatment of the trope of the bird is both particularly gruesome and touching. Freud's description of the 'heimlich' as tame, intimate, friendly all relate to the more feminised traditional cultural representation of small birds, which is rendered 'unheimlich' by Lê's text.[45] As the narrator wanders in a park, the path is littered with the bodies of dead birds which crunch underfoot as she walks. The 'ailes/elles' are broken. Birds are dropping from trees all around her as '[l]es hommes de l'Organisation se sont fait chasseurs. Ils tirent sur les oiseaux par jeu. Leurs fusils sont pointés vers moi. Ils m'attendent au tournant pour m'abattre' (V 35), and we can easily read the identification between the narrator and the hunted birds.

[43] This equivalence of convent and asylum echoes Santos and recurs in *Lettre morte*, where the narrator says, 'J'en venais à souhaiter que le couvent ou la cellule de fou me délivrât du monde. Là, j'aurais trouvé la paix, à l'abri des regards, des tentations. Là, j'aurais été comme morte, enterrée loin de toute société, succombant au vide,' (LM 81-2).

[44] This metaphor again recalls Cixous' evocation of women's writing as the attempt to 'voler' or take flight/steal into language in *Le Rire de la Méduse* (1961).

[45] We might think of the Disney fairytales of Snow White, surrounded by flowers and small birds, for example.

There is a moment of gut-wrenching pathos amid the brutality and gore, as the narrator displays empathy and tenderness towards her avian counterparts, ‘Je ramasse un oiseau blessé qui palpite encore contre mon sein. Je le caresse. Sous mes doigts, il se transforme en pierre. Une pierre tachée de sang indélébile' (ibid.) and this too is twisted into violence against the self, as the dead birds, at her touch, fly off to gather and turn on her to peck her eyes out. As the narrator flees, crushing again the wings of the birds on the path underfoot, she is hit in the back by a bullet and, collapsing, she joins the dead birds on the ground (V 36). If we follow the metaphor's thread, it leads us back to the women patients in the asylum, one of whom describes herself and her fellow patients thus, 'on me donne la becquée, comme aux petits oiseaux, Pauvres petits oiseaux tombés de leur nid, Je suis tombée de mon lit ce matin' (V 10). We recall how the Organization's agents address the narrator in avian terms, ordering her: 'Brûle-toi les ailes' (24).

The thread also leads forward to *Lettre Morte* where the avian motif recurs frequently, and manifests variously in birds nourished by the father or destroyed by the cruel lover Morgue. The narrator there describes herself as a bird with broken wings, 'je ressemble à une loque, à un oiseau blessé qui traîne ses ailes.' (LM 52).[46] Later, *In memoriam*'s central female character, Sola, who takes her own life, is also frequently compared to birds, in a very characteristically Lêian inter-corpus web of echoes. The madwoman and the (mad) woman writer become the poor little bird who must burn her own wings/writings – the means to 'fly' is destroyed. Birds have long been tropes of authorship, and poetic 'song' in particular, in western literature. Consequently we may read the death or brutalisation of birds as metaphors for the loss of poetic voice, revealing again an authorial anxiety. The uncanny scene leads us to conclude that the narrator is in fact also threatened by the other 'mad' women, and herself, as the birds turn on her. As she touches the warm, living figure of femininity, it turns to stone in her hands. She cannot achieve positive, fruitful contact with the feminine outside the asylum.

Freud makes two points relating to how genre and focalisation impact the uncanny effect of a text which are worth adding here. He argues that a writer can choose a setting of poetic reality (for which we may read also the fantastic) that robs ghosts and spirits of uncanniness, however, 'the situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of

[46] There is a particularly symbolic scene presenting the father's letters as white wings taking flight; they fall into dark water from whence the narrator rescues them, but Morgue breaks their wings, thus a further image of 'ailes/elles' and writing being destroyed (LM 46).

common reality' (Freud: 1955, 250). The fact that the severed heads, crunched birds and multi-headed dogs appear outside the delirious space of the asylum and in a more realistically-sketched setting described with real place-names deepens their uncanny impact, despite being apparently born of the narrator's delirium. It would be less arresting to read of grotesque hallucinations and severed heads in a mental hospital where the illogical and unnatural are expected to reside. The highly subjective focalization of the narrative lends to its uncanny effect on the reader, as we are not distanced from the personal perception of the element producing the uncanny effect, rather we share more closely in that experience. The text draws the reader into its madness.

Significantly, Freud concludes that the uncanniness in the haunting return of the repressed 'springs from its proximity to the castration complex', thus for him the uncanny in literature exposes an anxiety about 'castration' (1955, 244). Castration brings us back to the linguistic 'état zéro', to what Julia Kristeva describes as the 'rupture', 'the break indispensable to the advent of the symbolic' (*Women's Time* 1986, 198). And Lacan's seminal essay on the Mirror Stage, the key moment of subjectivity and entry into language, contains similar references to the fragmented body, 'le corps morcelé', which recall Freud's uncanny and Lê's 'jambages arrachés' and severed heads. Emergence from this fragmented state is *necessary* to function psychologically in society, in the Symbolic order of language and the social:

> Ce corps morcelé [...] se montre régulièrement dans les rêves, quand la motion de l'analyse touche à un certain niveau de désintégration agressive de l'individu. Il apparaît sous la forme de membres disjoints et de ces organes en exoscopie, qui s'ailent et s'arment pour les persécutions intestines. (*Le Stade du miroir*, 93-4)

Lê's *Voix* has taken us, with her narrator, back to this *corps morcelé*, this mirror stage where the forming subject seeks identification, and as we shall see, the identification she finds is with the father.

Freud notoriously writes from a masculinist, phallogocentric position, and Lacan arguably no less so, despite the determined and productive efforts of theorists such as Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose to recuperate him for feminist purposes. For an alternative perspective, Kristeva's feminist psychoanalytic insight is illuminating when examining the *gendered* uncanny in operation in *Voix*. Kristeva describes how women may try to understand their

position in language or 'go further and call into question the very apparatus itself' but 'always starting from this point' of castration (1986, 198). She continues:

> A therefore difficult, if not impossible, identification with the sacrificial logic of separation and syntactical sequence at the foundation of language and the social code leads to the rejection of the symbolic – lived as *the rejection of the paternal function and ultimately generating psychoses* (199; my emphasis)

This impossible identification with the sacrificial logic founding language recalls the narrator's horror that 'l'Organisation' wishes to sacrifice her to purify itself.

The Woman (Writer) in the Man's Hat

Lê's uncanny castration in *Voix* goes to the heart of the woman's position in language. Her narrator here rejects (or flees from) the paternal function as represented by the Organisation, but then also does violence to the father figure, who appears dying or dead, and decomposing, and she then *replaces* this 'father' herself (there are recurrent hallucinations of her taking the father's place in death) and does violence to that replacing self. Lê's solution to the authorial anxiety exposed by *Voix'*s uncanny crisis appears to be to assume the father's voice, and write from this troubled, ambivalent subjectivity. Cousseau argues that in this early trilogy Lê is seeking to develop or discover a/her voice, 'C'est la naissance d'une voix que nous donne à lire la trilogie de Linda Lê' (2002, 208). She concludes that it is the father's voice Lê assumes, 'Faire résonner la voix du père, écrire depuis cette voix' (ibid., 202).

If we return to the synecdoche of the writing hand, *Voix* presents the woman writer unable to make physical or vocal contact with the father until in a gruesome but oddly touching scene as the father's body falls apart while holding the narrator's hand, it is his 'main droite' that detaches at the wrist to remain connected to her, 'sa main droite, enlevée au poignet, est restée accrochée à la mienne' (V 46) – the woman has the 'right' hand to write with at last. This hand of right, and of writing, is passed on from the father. In *Lettre morte* there is a recurrent motif of father and daughter presented hand-in-hand, underpinning this metaphor of symbiotic union with the father, which becomes parasitic possession. In another scene in

Voix, it is again the father's hand which draws the bloodied ink of writing from the narrator's womb: 'Il plonge la main dans mon ventre ouvert et en sort des lettres à l'encre bleue ensanglantées' (V 50) (an image which reinforces the Santosian idea of an 'enfant-langage'). This image further supports the idea that for Lê's *femmes de lettres* the strategy adopted to resolve the anxiety of authorship appears to be to adopt or assume the voice of the masculine, which at this point in particular is that of the father.

This is further underlined by the dual burning of the narrator's own manuscript and her father's letters as she says, 'Je dois obéir à l'Organisation, pour que cesse la persécution, pour que taisent les ordres. Je brûle une à une les lettres qui vont se mêler aux cendres de la romance' (V 26). In this way, the narrator cedes to her anxieties relating to a Symbolic order that cannot tolerate her (writing's) existence, and what rises phoenix-like from these mingled ashes is the hybrid, hermaphrodite voice of a woman writer writing with a man's voice, or at least a woman possessed by a male or the masculine. In *Lettre morte,* immediately following *Voix,* Lê writes, 'J'ai laissé mon père mourir seul [...] et maintenant *il parle à travers moi* [...] J'erre dans un labyrinthe sombre où resonnent les paroles du mort.' (LM 10-11; my emphasis). That text is filled with references to and images of the daughter being possessed by, speaking for, or being spoken through by the father, in a form of melancholic incorporation. As Cousseau points out, Lê's (re)discovery of the father's voice as the voice through which she will write, is also the return to the signified (from the psychosis of 'castration'), 'c'est ainsi passer du registre de l'Imaginaire à celui du Symbolique', which allows Lê to 'enfin se constituer en sujet écrivant' (2002, 209; 210). However, this Symbolic subjectivity is predicated on spectral possession – a case of ghostly body-snatching – and it is a fragile, problematic ontological status, as the Symbolic father passes from the *surmoi* to the *en-moi*, where 'synthesis is replaced by symbiosis' (McIlvanney 2009, 380).[47] *Lettre morte* is subtended by a constant recourse to the father's ghostly presence as that which enables writing, and the narrator declares that the voice of the father, his writing, 'délivrait le droit à l'existence' (LM 23). She has recreated a spectral authority figure to repair the 'monde sans Dieu' (Argand 1999).

[47] This is underlined by the characterisation of their symbiosis in *Lettre morte*'s opening lines in terms of the 'supplice de Mézence' (LM 7), referring to King Mezentius's practice of tying 'corpses to living bodies, as a means of torture placing hand on hand and face against face [...] that wretched embrace' (Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book VIII, lines 485-488).

This granting of the right to exist (approval of authority) may be read positively, and *Lettre morte* has been seen as marking a positive turning point in Lê's oeuvre, not least by Lê herself. She maintains in 1999 that with *Voix* and *Lettre morte* she had surmounted her crisis and was thus able to mature and evolve as an author able to write with less rage and more light and nuanced tenderness, 'Avec *Voix* et la crise que j'ai traversée, la colère s'est tue, elle a fait place à une sérénité qui autorise la recherche d'un style différent [...] Pour l'heure au moins, j'ai l'impression de m'être reconciliée avec moi-même' (Argand 1999). Several critics also read it positively. Bacholle-Bošković describes it thus, '*Lettre morte*, en même temps que ce texte met un terme à la trilogie, marque la fin du consentement des femmes à cette condition de victime dans l'oeuvre de Linda Lê' (2007, 183). McIlvanney also reads *Lettre morte* as presenting a narrator ostensibly marking a movement towards a more adult sense of self-perception, with the symbolic dual burial of the father and metonymically of the cruel lover Morgue (through her burial of the scarf given by Morgue as a gift) presented as a therapeutic step enabling the narrator to move on (2009).

However, Lê's 'Pour l'heure au moins' in the above quotation belies the fragility of this re-found confidence, and her own anticipation of renewed crisis, which she experiences a few years later. McIlvanney rightly recognizes the ambivalence of the outcome, which while potentially nurturing linguistic production, is nonetheless also presented as parasitic, the ghost inside eating away the daughter's own self. So it may be healing but, 'not in the form of greater independence or separation, however, but in the form of greater integration with the father' (McIlvanney 2009, 381). Ledoux-Beaugrand similarly concludes that 'cette filiation par prise de corps se révèle paradoxale' (2008, 51). There is a telling image earlier of the narrator navigating the dark labyrinth guided by the candle she holds, when the father's ghost comes along and the candle is blown out, his presence leaving her lost in the dark, 'J'avance dans le labyrinthe, une bougie à la main. Mais à mi-chemin, on a soufflé sur la bougie. La lumière s'est éteinte. Je suis dans le noir. Je tâtonne. Le fantôme rôde autour de moi' (LM 11).

This incorporation to cheat separation effectively *cheats* castration.[48] The figure of the woman writer here has therefore still not taken the essential step leading to her *own* entry into language on her own terms. The narrator has found a voice, but to what extent can it be

[48] Lê's reworking of the Cronos myth in *Lettre morte* is illuminating – an old beggar at the entrance to the cinema where she goes with her father is identified as Cronos, devouring children as they enter, in a metaphor of castration, but the narrator is safe because of the father's presence, 'main dans la main' (LM, 68-9).

described as her own voice? The title itself hints at a persistent anxiety – the *Lettre morte*, the epistolary novel, is written but will it simply remain a dead letter, as in 'rester lettre morte'? Lê speaks in 1999, following the publication of this early 'mad' or 'paternal' trilogy, of the loss of 'mon lecteur idéal, mon lecteur imaginaire [...] le ciel est devenu désert, le monde sans Dieu' (Argand 1999). This shifts the anxiety from that of authorship to readership and reception, which is perhaps where the crux of the issue lies for women in publishing at this current time. As a result of the persistence of troubled female narrators, the return to the thematics of madness (*Conte de l'amour bifrons* [2005]) and the progression into suicide and suicidal self-sacrifice (*In memoriam* [2007]; *Cronos* [2010]) in Lê's later works, we are forced to see the rather more hopeful tone of the millenial *Les Aubes* (2000) as another false dawn and the positive readings above as prematurely (if understandably) optimistic.

Although Lê symbolically lays to rest, with their dual burial, the dominating influences of the father and Morgue, this is accompanied by the sense of having also buried herself, so closely has she identified with or been dominated by these figures: 'il me semble [...] que j'ai été enterrée en même temps que mon père' (LM 103). This leads to the desire for rebirth that is, however, marked with uncertainty by the question mark closing the following line near the end of the text, 'La mort de mon père signifiera-t-elle ma mort ou une seconde naissance?' (LM 104). In writerly terms, this uncertain rebirth signifies Lê's mission, 'trouver une langue personnelle', described in the Loucif interview cited earlier. The closing lines of *Lettre morte* gesture to an uncertain renaissance, presenting the narrator opening the window of her previously claustrophobic bedroom to the dawn: 'J'entends venir la vie. Ses ailes se posent doucement sur moi. Je vais quitter cet appartement [...] Je dois m'en aller [...] Laisse pénétrer la fraîcheur de l'aube' (LM 105).

The rebirth that comes, in the subsequent novel *Les Aubes*, takes the form of a self-mutilated *male* narrator, who has blinded himself and who is suicidal and suffering mentally. The crisis has not been overcome. A monovocal, first-person female narrative does not resurface in Lê's novels until ten years later in *À l'enfant*. Once again, the phrase 'Je dois m'en aller' in the closing paragraphs of *Lettre morte* indicates the return to *errance* and the resumption of the search for a voice – *a voice of one's own*, to paraphrase Woolf. The closing of the early trilogy is certainly a turning point in the corpus, but as the next chapter will make clear, while the *femme de lettres* may take her fate in her own hands in a very Lêian *refus*

personified in the figure of Antigone, the outcome is ultimately ambivalent for the woman writer, or at least for the *woman* aspect of the woman writer.

This possession of the woman writer by the male instantiated in *Voix* and *Lettre morte*, creating a hermaphrodite being, essentially genderless-because-both-genders, is personified by the apparently minor character in *Voix* who I would like to pull out of the chorus to foreground briefly as a character carrying far greater importance than its slight presence might suggest. This is the woman patient in the hospital described as 'une femme au chapeau, un chapeau d'homme' (V 7), who appears, seated alongside the narrator on the hospital bench, seven lines into the narrative on the first page. She is therefore the first character the narrator and the reader encounter, and is presented in very close proximity to the narrator in the following terms: 'Près de moi, une femme au chapeau, un chapeau d'homme à bord rabaissé de dessous lequel jaillissent de belles boucles noires, passe la main sur son ventre, gémit, J'ai faim, puis, répétant le même geste, Mon bébe, mon chéri, où-es-tu?' (ibid.). This male-hatted woman then embraces the narrator, trembling, and says, 'J'ai peur, On est en prison ici, On devient fou' (V 7). Critics tend to focus on her as the woman in a hat who has lost a baby, overlooking or underplaying the qualification that it is a man's hat, and the fact that her phantom pregnancy is now a permanent condition, as well as the fact of her profession as a painter and poet.[49] This figure is therefore an artistic writing woman in a man's hat who has lost a phantom male baby yet is permanently pregnant with a male child. This cross-dressed woman's voice is the first to chime with or intersect the narrator's, and her character features prominently in the first asylum section.

The woman describes her miscarriage as her baby rejecting her, and Cousseau reads the character as an inverse projection of a lack of maternal love, representing the absence of maternal affection and the vilification of the mother in Lê's work (2002, 212). This is not unconvincing, however might the character not also be read as a metaphoric manifestation of the author herself? Lê the author in this light becomes a woman in a man's hat who compulsively obsesses about pregnancy or maternity and its failure, loss or rejection, *yet remains always impregnated with a phantom masculine presence*.[50] Lê as the 'femme au

[49] Lê's own father was a painter and poet, something she felt brought them closer.

[50] We can see a precursor to this minor character from *Voix* in the tale of the rural peasant, recounted in *Les Trois Parques,* who carried the dead foetus of his twin brother tumour-like for twenty years. The 'unborn son within' returns with an anti-maternal vengeance years later in *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas,* which I discuss fully in the next chapter.

chapeau d'homme' is eternally pregnant with a phantom son that she will never give birth to, it must be kept within, like the male twin or 'double masculin' that Lê constantly refers to in her novels and interviews. The subject may remain, in this way, hermaphrodite. Bowlby's line resonates with increased significance here, as she describes the woman writer who dares to put her pen to paper, metaphorically putting her feet on the social streets, 'If she tried to *flâner* or to write, *she might be obliged to identify herself as a man, or at least not to look like a woman'* (1992, 8). This inner masculinity may be empowering, enabling and productively queering, but to what extent does it obscure or overwhelm the feminine (and the maternal) at least a part of which is inevitably sacrificed on his behalf? This swing *back* to the father/masculine recalls Beauvoir's strategy of masculinisation in her middle period, and potentially evinces a regression to a more Beauvoirean model of the *femme de lettres*. This eternally-incorporated masculine is (non-)partnered with an ever-abjected femininity and a repeatedly refused maternity, and both ultimately may be seen as the conditions of possibility for Lê's authorship. Lê's corpus shifts from the psychology of crisis to the politics of negation, an idiosyncratic 'refus'. As the corpus develops, the paternal – variously adored, troubled, rejected, subsumed/incorporated – is transposed onto the fraternal and finally the (always male) filial, and each of these male figures at some point is seen to be subsumed within or necessary to the female writer. It is to this dynamic I now turn in Chapter Five.

-- Chapter Five --

Hybrid Madness and Antigonal Sacrifice in Linda Lê's Late Fiction

The figure of the madwoman resurfaces in Linda Lê's corpus six years after *Lettre morte*, in *Conte de l'amour bifrons* (2005), where it dominates once more.[1] In an informal interview, Lê relates this reappearance to the events of her own life and to 'de nouveaux effondrements', revealing that she had experienced renewed bouts of depression in the intervening years, 'J'ai eu de nouveau des périodes de difficulté', without elucidating further.[2] The figure of a mad or putatively mad and/or suicidal female writer or *femme de lettres* remains centre-stage in Lê's subsequent three novels, *In memoriam* (2007), *Cronos* (2010) and *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* (2011). The earlier *Conte de l'amour bifrons* (hereafter *Conte*) stands apart from the latter three, which form what I describe as a trilogy, based on their various intertextual *remaniements* of the Antigone myth. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the central female characters' or narrators' madness is accompanied by the search for the means to re-find, incorporate, reunite with or retain a male component within the *femme de lettres*, as a way apparently to overcome this madness and its concomitant anxiety of authorship.

In *Voix* and *Lettre morte*, the strategy adopted is the melancholic incorporation of the father, a parasitic symbiosis that is ultimately rejected or 'buried'. With *Conte* and the later novels, we see attempted a strategy of fusion or union with the brother/lover, a union which itself becomes another form of (now mutual) incorporation. This strategy is itself in turn finally rejected in favour of a further incorporation (or retention) of the 'son' (although a spectral never-to-be-born son), who we saw obliquely prefigured in the phantom pregnancy of the *femme au chapeau d'homme* of *Voix*. As we shall see, this final incorporation of a male figure – and crucially one always *internal* to the self as opposed to the previous *external* figures – appears most successfully to allow the female author to achieve stability and self-authority. With this shift away from the vertical Oedipal paradigm towards the horizontal sibling and Antigonal paradigm, Lê instantiates a paradigmatic shift that re-orients the focus established by Freud in the first decade of the nineteenth century. George Steiner elucidates

[1] Lê published seven texts in this six-year interim period, mainly either non-fiction or short stories.
[2] Unpublished personal interview, Paris: 17th October 2013.

how, prior to Freud's Oedipal obsession, European culture and Romanticism in particular had viewed *Antigone* as Sophocle's most important work. *Antigone* was a central cultural reference in the era following the French Revolution until the early twentieth century when, under Freud's influence, *Oedipus Rex* replaced the 'daughter' play's centrality (Steiner 1984, Chapter 1).[3] We shall see in this chapter how, in the latter period of her corpus, Lê draws our gaze away from the father, away from the Oedipal, and returns it to the rebellious daughter.

In this chapter I will firstly focus on the hermaphroditism of Lê's style and themes, and in particular the (re-)union of the genders that appears temporarily to assuage the madness and crisis of the female protagonist (and her male alter ego) in *Conte*. Secondly, I will examine the complex Antigonal thematics of a so-called mad *refus*, a Lêian politics of negation, present in what I describe here as her Antigone trilogy. This negation encompasses the refusal of maternity and the suicide or self-sacrifice of the female and the maternal (or maternity), and it concludes with yet another spectral masculine incorporation of the son Lê's narrator vows never to have, yet whose presence she carries in the folds of her being, in *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas*. I will explore how, through the dual themes of madness and suicide, the male-incorporation dynamics shift from the vertical father-daughter axis, via a process of figurative orphaning, to the horizontal axis of union with the brother/lover. I will then examine how (and why) this incestuous amorous 'sibling' union fails and is rejected in a series of these recent novels, and also how this failure or rejection is variously accompanied or followed by the descent of the *femme de lettres* into madness and suicide or a suicidal course of action. This search for union or fusion with a male figure culminates in the Antigone trilogy and in particular in the final text, *À l'enfant.* This latter presents what appears to be, finally, a *successful* incorporation of this never-to-be-born son, a 'maleness' that emanates from within the female author-narrator herself and furnishes Lê the author with the means to overcome and transcend long-held anxieties.

In a positive way, this attests to the 'inner masculinity' residing within each female-gendered individual, and the potential for self-authority existing innately within each writer, whether male or female. By self-authority I mean the ability to have recourse to the authority of the (female) self without the need for reassurance, sanction or approval from an external source of authority, the 'nom du père' in Lacanian terms or the 'lecteur idéal' in Lêian terms,

[3] We note, importantly, that *Antigone* is generally believed to have been written *before Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonnus*, despite its position as the third and chronologically final of the Theban Plays (Watling 1947, 12-13).

whose loss left her in a 'monde sans Dieu' searching to replace this 'Dieu' figure. Is the result of the process described above to efface the specificities of the female gender and leave a model of woman author as an un-gendered being? I will argue that Lê's hermaphroditic narratives develop a voice that is not gender/sex-*less* but rather one that *combines*, in hybrid form, male and female (and masculine and feminine) elements in an enriching manner (reminiscent of Cixous' bisexuality in *Le Rire de la méduse*). Another problematic question, of course, is why 'she' needs an inner male? Why this need for a man's hat, to be 'crowned' in masculine terms (with the male), in order for authorship to attain authority?

Parental Troubling and the Orphans Left Wandering

The 'monde sans Dieu' that Lê found herself in following the death of her father triggered her own personal crisis and the dominance of female madness in her writing. Before turning to examine the horizontal axis of union with the male brother/lover, we must examine when and how this shift from the paternal (vertical top-down axis) to the fraternal occurs, and also examine the nature of the parental figures, the mother and father, in the corpus. While the family is at the heart of Lê's novels, they are almost invariably dysfunctional families.[4] Lê's writing is marked by a troubling of parental figures. Her early texts in particular stage a crisis of the Oedipal 'scene', and trouble the parental positions of biological and cultural mother and father, the traditional Symbolic structures of patriarchy. In classic psychoanalytic terms, the Oedipal triangle establishes or instantiates the 'Law of the Father', which in the psychoanalytic paradigm has structured western patriarchal society, erecting the phallus and the father as the upright symbol of authority. He is guardian of the subject's entry into social life in his regulation and repression of the subject's desires, and the subject is thereby encoded with language and enters into the Symbolic system of culture and language as a gendered, speaking subject. The mother – beloved, desired – must be given up. This dynamic of 'law-giving father' and 'desired (or desirable) mother' is totally collapsed in Lê's writing.

We have seen in the previous chapter the extent to which the father's ghost casts a long shadow over Lê's corpus. Always beloved, he is a Symbolically-dispossessed character,

[4] See Bacholle-Bošković (2006, Ch.3) for a discussion of the 'roman familial' in Lê's earlier works. I agree with her conclusion that Thierry Guichard's Gidean title 'Le "Famille je vous haïs" de Linda Lê' for his 1995 dossier of *Le Matricule des anges* dedicated to Lê is 'par trop facile' (2006, 101).

repeatedly presented as venerated but weak, and a figure of failure in social, economic, emotional and even artistic terms. From his earliest appearance, a key phrase relating to the father is 'le roi déchu', the dethroned king. In *Les Trois Parques* (1997) the father is a reincarnation of Shakespeare's mad and disempowered King Lear, and Lê describes his character in a 2007 interview, 'il n'a aucune richesse, aucun pouvoir. C'est un roi sans couronne, démuni, qui attend tout de l'amour de ses filles' (Loucif, 887). Time after time, the father has no wealth, no power, no status, no social or economic weapons. In *Les Aubes* again the father is 'le roi déchu' (2000, 103). There he is in a submissive position of inferiority in relation to the mother figure, whom he literally 'serves' as he is bullied into (and bullied in) a token role as an employee in his wife's large, powerful business empire. Later in the corpus when the father recedes into the background of Lê's novels (but rarely disappears completely), as in *In memoriam* and *Cronos,* he is a pitiful if touchingly poetic character. However weak, the father is nonetheless a uniquely privileged and venerated figure and there is a marked ambivalence surrounding him. Lê speaks of her 'grande vénération' for her own father, and says in 1999, of the recurring father figure in her work, 'Alors qu'il fait plutôt figure de déchu, d'homme humilié dans la famille, pour moi c'est un héros' (Argand).

If the father is venerated, even deified, the mother is vilified, or conspicuously absent in Lê's corpus until *À l'enfant*, and mother*hood* is repeatedly rejected.[5] The father is the *roi déchu*, and the mother is the *objet chu* (similar to Dominique in *Les Belles Images*). This maternal absence is replicated in the discussion of her own life in the interviews Lê gives, where she talks far more freely about her father, but is reticent about her mother. Lê gives some explanation recently, highlighting that unlike her father, her mother is still alive: 'Il est vrai que la figure de la mère dans mes livres est souvent une figure maléfique. Mais cela a peu à voir avec ma mère telle qu'elle est dans la vie. Comme elle vit toujours à deux cents kilomètres de chez moi, je trouverai indélicat de l'évoquer' (Personal interview, 2012).[6] Where she does appear, the mother is the *marâtre* par excellence. As Bacholle-Bošković observes, 'la mère maternante s'efface dans l'oeuvre entière devant la mère autoritaire' (2006, 182). She is universally autocratic, wielding an overweening authority that is rejected in the ethic of the texts. In *Les Aubes,* the mother who presides over a major business consortium is despised

[5] Bacholle-Bošković notes that 'Lê ne donne jamais directement la parole à la mère' in her narratives (2006, 180).
[6] This distancing is undermined to some extent by the content of *À l'enfant* and Lê's comments in interviews regarding that text, and also by the fact that she states her mother does not read her texts. However, I am here primarily reading the mother figure in metaphoric and psychologically structural terms.

and the narrator calls her 'cette souveraine' (67) and 'une marâtre impérieuse' (113), and the father grudgingly dubs her 'La Régente' (167). In *Les Trois Parques* (1997) the mother herself is utterly abject, having died giving birth, and is replaced by a hideous, jackal-like grand-mother, Lady Chacal, who is also head of a large business, here a funeral parlour.[7]

It is almost easy to ignore the mother, because Lê does.[8] However, this compulsive omission is itself a highly pregnant statement. The repressed mother returns very recently, with Lê's vengeance, in *À l'enfant* (2011). The narrator here, a woman author, is vituperative about her mother, nicknamed with Orwellian undertones as 'Big Mother' (in English), and '[e]lle était la reine' (ALQ 20). The narrator resents the rigid control the mother held over her and her sisters as they grew up, 'Big Mother surveillait de près nos allées et venues' (13) and 'elle s'était muée en championne des valeurs bourgeoises. Pas un préjugé qu'elle n'érigeait en loi' (15). It is not *her law*, rather we see the maternal figure cast as the enforcer of conservative society's laws and norms. This may be read as putting the father's beard – or man's hat – on the mother, thus making her another 'father' or patriarchal mother. We must recognise how the tendency to read an authoritative mother or female as some sort of masculinised woman or 'father' in order to wield authority may be the result of an internalisation of patriarchal structures, and Juliet Mitchell asserts that Western cultural concepts and structures of patriarchy are so collectively internalised that 'the law of the mother cannot be *thought* about' (2003, 52; original italics). This should not occlude the reality that daily discipline is meted out within the majority of households by *mothers*, and rather it alludes on a cultural level to the difficulty of western society to imagine a true matriarchy, so deeply-engrained is the structure of patriarchy. Certainly it is a role which earns the mother in Lê's corpus no respect, only hatred and resentment, and it is an authority that is resisted. The position of mother and role of motherhood are offered to the 'daughter' in the Antigone trilogy where they are emphatically rejected, and the extent to which mothers and maternity are rendered abject will be discussed fully in the second half of this chapter.

With the bearded mother wearing the trousers (or the hat/crown), what role is there for the father? In *Lettre morte,* Lê presents the father performing the maternal role, and her own

[7] The mother's death in the process of giving birth is symbolic, as the woman is killed at the very moment of engaging in the act of mothering/motherhood. Lady Chacal's own death is met with celebration by her grand-daughters.

[8] Lê's own preoccupation with the paternal in her writing over many years is replicated, quite understandably, in critical discussion of her work, which focuses heavily on the father, and both Lê and the critics' attention to the father obscures consideration of the maternal.

father became the primary carer after Lê's birth due to her mother's post-natal depression. Bacholle-Bošković states how, 'Aussi bien dans les textes que dans les interviews, Lê souligne la nature maternante du père' (2006, 182). She shows how Lê's texts display a sense of grief for the idealised 'mère maternante' and argues that perhaps the greatest lack or loss evident in her texts is not, as critics tend to conclude, of the lost father, but rather of a nurturing mother, giving rise to 'l'envie d'amour maternel' and that it is this desire for reunion with the mother that drives themes of incest, jumellism and fusing with the father: 'Derrière le (nom du) père se profile l'Ombre de la Mère' (Bacholle-Bošković 2006, 185). This argument is convincing, and I find it supported by the narratives to a great extent. However, I would stop short of concluding that the father represents *only* a figure of access to the (idealised notion of the loving) mother or a 'père-maternante.' The father is rather an over-determined figure, encompassing both a disempowered and emasculated father, and loving-but-missing-mother. If we relate this to Lê's characterisation of the father as 'un héros' and our discussion of his influence on Lê's creative development, we can see how the father's role as carer, protector and source of artistic encouragement combine to elevate him despite his fall from the throne. The effect of Lê's presentation in her earlier novels of the parental unit is to present a mothering-father who has toppled off his 'throne' of authority and a bearded-mother arrogating a place on a throne she is refused. This troubled scene has implications for the 'children' that are transposed thematically in the novels, and 'la faute des parents bouillonne dans un chaudron où l'on jette les petits' (LA, 114). The cultural positions of mother and father are confused and collapsed and the parental unit is a troubled site from which authority cannot be drawn.

A corollary of this unsettled Oedipal structure is the dynamics of cultural orphaning and the shift of focus from the horizontal relationship with the father to the vertical relationship with the brother/lover that becomes increasingly central to Lê's texts following *Lettre morte*.[9] At the close of *Lettre morte*, the assumption of the father's voice is ultimately rejected. With the symbolic 'burial' there of both the father and Morgue, embodying the cultural parentage of Vietnam and mainstream French culture respectively, Lê makes herself as an author a cultural orphan. Following *Lettre morte,* this manifests in a repeated thematics of self-orphaning,

[9] This shift of focus from the parent-child to the sibling or peer axis supports Mitchell's contention in *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (2003) that there may be a general cultural shift to the lateral sibling axis towards the end of the twentieth century.

beginning with *Les Aubes* (2000), and is very evident again in *Conte de l'amour bifrons* (2005), Lê's dark fairytale of bi-faced love.[10] In the same year as she published *Conte*, she wrote a non-fiction work entitled *Le Complexe de Caliban*, outlining her own Caliban complex:

> *L'écriture est d'abord une tentative de reniement. On se veut semblable à Don Quichote, l'homme tombé du ciel qui prétend [...] s'engendrer lui-même sans le concours de parents humains. Le nom du père est haïssable, on rêve à d'autres généalogies, mais la question des origines*, Qui pleure dans mon sang? *revient toujours à tarauder le renégat* [...] *Était-ce l'enfant en moi, l'enfant aimante et haineuse, qui voulait chanter la chanson du petit soldat orphelin et apatride, mais s'avouait incapable de faire taire l'appel du sang?* (2005, 67; original italics)

These lines wonderfully encapsulate the dynamics at work in Lê's writing at this point in her career, as *Conte* is published. There is the paradox of the attempt to renounce the parents in order to be 'tombé du ciel' or orphaned, which nonetheless cannot completely silence the call of blood. Anne Magnan-Park uses these lines to open her analysis of the use of the fairytale in Lê's writing, where she concludes persuasively that while the western fairytale genre has been read as offering metaphors of severance and the attainment of adult independence, they are in fact regulated by an inevitable return to the father or parents, in what she calls 'un retour nécessaire [...] qui s'offre à notre imaginaire comme une figure imposée' (2008, 87). Linda Lê, Magnan-Park argues, varies the fairy tale 'en le sevrant de la notion de retour' and installing instead 'la notion du non-retour' (ibid.). This 'non-retour', because a return to origins is impossible for Lê, leads to 'l'éloignement [...], l'erreur, l'errance, au fourvoiement' and it is only through writing that any sense of belonging, an alternative type of homecoming, is possible (Magnan-Park, ibid., 89). This further reinforces the idea of Lê's autogenographic mode of writing – child only of herself and her own writing.

This self-orphaning or willed rejection of the parental reaches an apotheosis in *Conte.* Here both central characters Ylane and Ivan, who are emphatically mutual alter egos, are violently orphaned. We learn three pages into the text that Ylane's parents are dead, killed in a car

[10] In *Les Aubes*, parents are abandoned, vilified and left behind by the narrator and his female alter ego, Vega, who, having been raped by her father, has run away from home and is, 'Fille de personne, augure d'une ère qui jugerait les fautes des pères et trancherait les liens du sang' (LA 117). The narrator describes himself and Vega as orphans (LA 145; 186).

crash, 'Et cette mort soudaine avait tranché les derniers noeuds qui la reliaient à sa lointaine famille' (CAB 11), and there is a repeated insistence on Ylane severing all ties with the world: 'il lui fallait rompre tous les fils qui la rattachait au monde' (10). Ivan's mother has also died by the time of the narrative present, when he was just seventeen, and although his father is still alive, he is a brutal figure, 'cet homme distant, glacial', and his cruel parentage is categorically rejected (CAB 20).[11] Ivan has been named after his father, who in turn carries the name of a vicious military hero, 'un ancêtre glorieux', and Ivan rejects all identification with these 'fathers': 'Ivan ne voulait rien devoir à sa famille, surtout à son père et à cet aïeul dont l'existence était pour lui une marque d'infamie' (CAB 19). Writing is the only heritage Ivan wishes to acknowledge: 'Ivan aurait aimé que de l'encre coulât dans ses veines. Il avait renié son sang' (ibid.). He chooses to identify with his literary namesake, Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov, a character who evokes strong echoes of patricide and rejection of the father. Ivan not only rejects his father as a role model, he refuses his authority, 'Il transgressait tous les commandments du père', and his favourite phrase is '[s]i seulement j'étais enfant de personne' (CAB 20).

Following his mother's funeral Ivan leaves home and embarks on a restless, rootless wandering - 'Commença une longue période d'errance' (ibid.) - which leaves him living on the margins of society in condemned, rat-infested buildings. This directionless wandering in *Conte* resumes the *errance* so pronounced in the earlier 'mad' texts and for both Ylane and Ivan this state of exilic orphanhood coincides with mental crisis, which in fact it appears to trigger. The crisis of voice, and authority, erupts once more in the madness experienced by *Conte'*s central female protagonist, and shared by her male alter ego Ivan. Ivan is haunted and tormented by the voice of the father and he flees into psychotic hallucination, 'la voix du père, l'homme des dix commandements, le poursuivait' (CAB 20). Ivan struggles to resist this authority and his transgression is characterised by madness and mental crisis:

> Son corps amaigri semblait rassembler toutes ses forces pour dire non à l'image du père qui le hantait [...] Le père était toujours là, se dressant au coin des rues pour lui dire de tourner à droite ou à gauche. Il désobéissait, allait à gauche quand la voix lui ordonnait

[11] We note this rare presentation of a traditional Oedipal parental structure. However, the nurturing mother is dead and the father's authority is utterly rejected.

d'aller à droite. Il répondait à l'ogre, *Non, tu ne m'auras pas, je ne me laisserai pas dévorer.* (CAB 21; original italics)

The vocabulary of the fairytale and the monstrous in 'ogre' is used here as elsewhere to characterise the parental. Importantly, Ivan resists these hallucinations of destructive patriarchal authority through *poetry*, this privileged form of linguistic illogic resistance to the logos, this semiotic mode of language as we saw in relation to Emma Santos, which is consistently privileged by Lê, who sees the writer as an artist and a poet. Ivan ceaselessly writes and rewrites in his head 'un poème qu'il se récitait pour conjurer la fin du tyran' and of course this poem may be seen as a trope for the text itself, the poetic language Lê conjures to evoke and bring about 'la fin du tyran' (CAB 21).

The Bi-face Fairytale of Hermaphrodite Writing

With de-throned parents, the problem for the orphaned generation is where to find the identifications and 'law' that will effect entry into gendered subjectivity. Butler puts it thus, 'radical practices in kinship demand a rearticulation of the structuralist presuppositions of psychoanalysis and, hence, of contemporary gender and sexual theory' (2000, 19). In psychoanalytic terms, we must rethink how the subject establishes subjectivity, and a gendered identity, or rather we must imagine new ways for this process to take place. This re-thinking is the context for this next phase in Lê's search for a voice and for the source of authority that will appease authorial anxiety and quell the crisis in her corpus. Along the trajectory I am tracing, the phase represented in particular by *Conte* appears at an intermediary point between the early madness trilogy and the sublimation achieved through the later Antigone trilogy. As a result of this journey, Lê ultimately appears to develop a hermaphrodite voice, and she writes in her 2012 *Lame de fond*, 'L'hermaphrodite est l'avenir de l'homme' (2012, 64). This is the voice she is still searching for in *Conte*.

La femme au chapeau d'homme of *Voix* embodies a pronounced hybrid or hermaphrodite tendency in Linda Lê's narratives. Lê often combines male and female narrative voices, where the *je* position, and consequently, gendered subjectivity, alternates from or within texts between male and female, in a manner reminiscent of Beauvoir's middle clutch of novels. Lê also presents layers of gendered subjectivity, producing, in novels by a woman, a male

narrative voice describing a woman, a mechanism which has been described elsewhere as 'layers of ironic ventriloquism' (Bowlby 1992, 56).[12] On the level of character, too, her texts are structured alternatively around male or female central protagonists and alter egos. Mutilated characters of one sex are 'completed' by characters of the other sex. This hybridity is replicated on the level of language and style, for example in the often-arresting combination of registers between sophisticated formal (conventional) French and extremely vulgar and informal (transgressive) slang or *verlan*. Her style is a further synthesis of poetic and more conventional prose, varying in degree at various points in her career.

Critics have long picked up on a certain gender hybridity in Lê's writing, but which has tended to be overshadowed by the question of its racial hybridity. It has been described as 'androgyny' (Bacholle-Bošković 2006, 185), 'gender hybridity', 'gender and sexual ambiguity' (Yeager 1997, 262,) and hermaphroditism (Selao 2011, 193). As early as her publishing debut in 1987, Lê asserts that she writes for 'son double masculin' and adds, 'J'écris pour l'homme qui est dans chaque femme et pour la femme qui est dans chaque homme' (interview cited in Yeager 1997, 262). This is not about androgyny in the sense of indeterminacy of sex or the erasure of gender, which would take us *hors sexe* and therefore also outside linguistic subjectivity. Lê's hermaphroditism is a combining pairing that unites two strands into an enriched and novel third – hybrid – term, and *Conte* stages an emphatic attempt at such hybridity.

Lê was particularly intrigued by the bizarre story in the Vietnamese and world press, of a twenty-year-old Vietnamese rural man who experienced pregnancy pains and was discovered to be impregnated with a dead foetus. She offers a fantastical account of the case in *Les Trois Parques* (1997):

> Le pauvre bougre portait depuis vingt ans dans son ventre le fœtus de son jumeau, qui aurait dû naître en même temps que lui mais, miracle et misère des fusions-effusions, le fœtus s'était retréci en tumeur et, au lieu de chercher à voir le jour, il s'était réfugié dans le ventre de son jumeau. (LTP 221-2)

[12] Significantly, in the novels at the height of her emotional and literary crisis, *Voix* and *Lettre morte*, narration is in the first-person female voice. Following these, her narratives rest mainly in the male, androgynous or combinations of male-female, until the return of the first-person female-only narrative in *À l'enfant* (2011).

Lê was fascinated by the image of this pregnant man, and by its feminisation of the male and evocation of male maternity. In her essay entitled 'Littérature déplacée' in her collection of prefaces, *Tu écriras sur le bonheur* (1999), she writes:

> Ma patrie, je la porte comme ce jeune paysan portait le fœtus de son jumeau. C'est un lien monstrueux. Un lien où le pays natal, le jumeau donc, est couvé et étouffé, reconnu et dénié. Et finalement porté comme on porte un enfant mort. Ce lien monstrueux commande mon rapport à cette autre patrie, *la littérature, qui naît de l'obsession d'une tare, d'une malformation, et qui s'adresse à un double.* (330; my emphasis)[13]

While not wishing to downplay the racial twinning undoubtedly in operation in this motif, I wish to focus here on the gender dynamics at work. For Lê, the 'pays natal' is at this time inextricably associated with the lost, abandoned father, a male figure with whom she personally and symbolically identifies in her life and in her writing, in a 'monstrous bond' with literature. The words 'tare' meaning defect or flaw, and 'malformation' in the above quotation are significant, implying the sense that, for Lê, literature is born of the desire to compensate for some imperfection or lack. The final words of the quotation gesture towards the preoccupation with the figure of the 'double' present in Lê's writing, something she acknowledges repeatedly in interviews. In 1995 she speaks of 'le double qui est en soi, celui que l'on aurait voulu être, devenir, et que l'on porte comme un mort. C'est ce sentiment qui survit à l'horreur d'être né, le sentiment d'avoir perdu, d'avoir tué un frère jumeau' (Argand). This statement, echoed in so many ways in her novels, reveals a strong sense of gender dysphoria, describing 'he who I would have wished to be' and a sense of guilt for having killed or silenced a male twin-within. The perfecting drive or redemptive aspect to her writing takes on further significance in the context of the Antigone intertext later. The various textual unions with or incorporations of the male figures operate to serve this redemptive effort, as the imperfection or lack is explicitly and implicitly designated by the absence or loss of a male other half.

[13] Lê's fascination with the double is one of several parallels between her and Sylvia Plath, who wrote a thesis on the double in literature and psychology. Along with the early loss of a beloved father and suicide attempts, another key point of intersection between the two writers is the influence of Nietzsche and his conception of a writer giving all, to the point of writing with blood, which Plath was drawn to early on and is a ubiquitous motif in Lê's work. See Andrew Wilson for details on Plath (2013; in particular 334; 106). Lê admires Plath greatly, and regularly reads her poetry and diaries (Personal Interview 2013).

The search for the other-gendered alter ego, the *double masculin* for the female figure, finds its apogee in *Conte*. Here this search is the most explicit, comes closest to being realised, and yet begins to shift towards an acceptance of its impossibility or inadequacy as a model for being – or as the psychological basis for a writerly voice. This model of (re)union is rejected by the female protagonist, and this rejection becomes more explicit and structurally central in the Antigone motif of the subsequent novels, as we shall see in the final part of this chapter. In *Conte,* the madness which had simmered in the novels following *Lettre morte* erupts once more and the uncanny crisis and madness of *Voix* resurface. In *Conte*, this crisis is not focalised through a first-person female narrator, but is shared by the central female protagonist Ylane and her male double or alter ego Ivan in another example of narrative layering, as the mainly third-person narrative is told through the voice of an anonymous and androgynous narrator who describes the process of writing the couple's tale in moments of first-person intervention. Ylane and Ivan share centre-stage, and we access their emotions and motivations through a form of *style indirect libre*, but there is no room for doubt that the key figure here again is the 'mad' female, as the narrator tells us twice on the opening page, 'Le personnage central de ce roman s'appelle Ylane' (CAB 7). The tale follows the separate threads of these characters' lives, weaving them progressively more tightly together until they form one interwoven braid when they meet and fall in love in the asylum. Later this interwoven mutuality unravels, as we shall see.

Ylane and Ivan each experience mental crisis as a result of loss, isolation and a deep-rooted sense of *non-appartenance* that emanates from their self-orphaning rejection of the parental scene, and their crisis leaves each in a form of self-imposed social and emotional exile. Ylane has suffered what appears to be depression for many years, and has been treated by doctors repeatedly both in and out of the asylum. The narrator describes Ylane sitting murmuring to herself in her kitchen as the novel opens:

> Elle est là, chuchotait Ylane. Elle est revenue. De nouveau dans ma tête. Sur mes lèvres. Au bout de mes doigts. Elle. La folie. Revenue pour me gâcher la vie. Elle. Démoniaque. Elle. En deuil. Rouge et noire. Rouge comme le sang. Noire comme les mots imprimés qui

> dansent devant mes yeux. Elle. Son regard furibond. Sa bouche comme une plaie faite par les comprachicos. Elle. Ma proche ennemi. (CAB 8)[14]

Again, as in *Voix,* we see madness afflicting the points of speech and writing, Ylane's lips and finger-tips, and it makes the printed word dance confusedly. Madness is accompanied again by the loss of language, or rather the inability to control language. Crucially, Ylane is a *poète manqué*, '[e]lle aurait pu être poète et écrire des vers semblables à des lucioles dans la nuit' (ibid.), and we are not entirely clear *why* she has been unable to fulfil her potential as a poet, although one obvious conclusion is that the depression she has suffered for years has impaired her linguistic powers. Symbolically, she works as a 'standardiste', a telephone operator whose role it is to connect the voices and speech of others (CAB 9), until she gives up even this role in language and cedes to the mutism of a more all-embracing madness. Her mental crisis is marked by silent withdrawal from the world, 'Elle avait cessé de se rendre à son travail et le téléphone, qui sonnait sans arrêt trois semaines auparavant parce qu'on la réclamait au bureau, restait désormais muet (CAB 9), and later '[e]lle ne répondait rien [...] elle éprouvait un plaisir pervers à se taire' (17).

Ivan, for his part, is a writer, and a minor published poet. He has attempted suicide, and suffered hallucinations and delirium, which is marked by its phonic or sonorous quality, and is characterised in similar terms to the crisis in *Voix*. His madness, like Ylane's, is linked to a crisis of language. For example, he is pursued by a pack of hounds who are agents of 'l'Ennemi' and these fantastical demons punish him by destroying his means of access to language: 'Ivan courait, courait, mais la horde sauvage avait réussi à l'encercler. Le roi ordonna qu'on lui coupât la langue et les mains, et de les jeter à la meute' (CAB 23). Once more, the organs of speech and writing are attacked.

The asylum serves as a locus for union between Ylane and Ivan and through this union, for salvation – although this salvation proves temporary. In the exilic refuge of the asylum our two mad orphans meet and fall in love, producing the 'amour bifrons' of the title. It is a soothing place of respite, and the medication they receive eases their suffering and helps them to cope, but these conventional medical remedies are explicitly insufficient to cure them or to provide permanent salvation from crisis. It is their love alone that initially saves these

[14] In light of the question of gender dysphoria, it is interesting to read the insistence here on 'la folie' as 'elle', which is repeated seven times, and the juxtaposition of 'Elle. Ma proche ennemi'.

scarred, suffering characters from madness, and their relationship is presented as 'salvateur' throughout the novel (e.g. CAB 86). Ylane, feeling Ivan's gaze on her, feels once more the desire to live, 'Les séjours au pavillon Benjamin Ball servaient à remonter et à huiler ses ressorts d'automate, mais n'arrivaient pas à lui donner le goût de vivre. Maintenant, tout avait changé' (CAB 43-4). This salvation is a mutual rebirth as they are born again *in each other*, 'Ylane renaissait en Ivan, Ivan vivait sa résurrection en Ylane. Le pavillon Benjamin Ball n'était plus le lieu de leur naufrage, mais l'île où leur passion avait pris racine et s'élançait vers le ciel' (51).Their renaissance produces symbiosis or mutual incorporation, as they exist for and *in* each other, and we see how this union performs yet another male incorporation. Their meeting is also framed by and mediated through literature, as, before they have the courage to speak to each other, each identifies the other with a favourite literary character, and their bond is constructed and reinforced through novels.

There is a clear gender aspect to this bond, not only because of the fact it is a union between a male and a female character, which could be read as coincidental or irrelevant, but also because of the language used to describe it. The romance is marked by the sibling character of their bond, an incestuous brother-sister coupling, and also by the extent to which each addresses and redresses a sense of gender dysphoria in the other, as they have both been yearning for a lost alter ego of the opposite sex. Ylane feels that with Ivan finally, 'Quelqu'un l'avait regardée, elle, en lui communiquant, très fugitivement, la sensation d'être son semblable. [Ivan] était son moi secret, le frère qu'elle n'avait pas eu, et le sauveur qui avait accompli le miracle de lui redonner confiance en elle' (CAB 44). Ivan carries 'la tristesse de n'être qu'un homme' (68), and his response to meeting Ylane is similar, 'C'était comme s'il avait trouvé une sœur, et jamais jusqu'à maintenant, il n'avait eu cette sensation grisante d'avoir rencontré son double' (41). The male, or being male, is valorised by Ylane, who is haunted by the ghost of 'le petit garçon que j'aurais voulu être. Je n'aime pas être dans la peau d'une jeune fille. J'aime encore moins la perspective de devenir une femme' (CAB 69). This is further figured in the loss of her younger brother Dylan who has died in early infancy, and in whose clothes Ylane's parents dress her until she is five (and the name connoting homophonically in French 'd'Ylane' is a non-too-subtle, perhaps ludic, twist by Lê). This has left Ylane haunted, even possessed, by his ghost: 'Elle était devenue la pâle imitation d'un mort [...] Elle était la doublure de Dylan [...] *Elle se taisait et elle laissait le fantôme l'habiter'* (CAB

90; my emphasis). This dynamic echoes the melancholic incorporation of *Lettre morte* and the ghostly ventriloquism of a female character inhabited by a male speaking through her.

For his part, Ivan mourns and yearns for a non-existent sister, who is however, oddly, a 'feminine brother': 'Si j'avais eu une soeur, disait Ivan, je l'aurais déguisée en garçon et je l'aurais appelée mon ombre. J'ai grandi avec une ombre à mes côtés. C'était mon frère féminin' (CAB 76). While Ivan 'fills' the masculine space in Ylane left vacant and symbolised by the lost brother, Ylane restores the feminine (semiotic) element lost to Ivan with his mother's death. The two are described frequently as brother and sister, doubles, or twins, and the homophonic quality of their names – Ylane and Ivan – literalises this entwined co-existence. Madness is now seen by Ivan as an initiatory journey, and union with Ylane the pilgrim's reward. For Ylane, their union operates to 'lui redonner confiance en elle' and appears to resolve her crisis of authority and language.

In order to examine in detail the failure of this symbiotic, hermaphroditic union, it is illuminating to consider Lê's fairytale of bi-face union in light of Aristophanes' mythical bi-face creatures in Plato's *Symposium*. Aristophanes, Attic culture's comic poet, describes how humans were originally three sexes, male, female and male-female, the latter being the hermaphrodite being:

> Previously, begins Aristophanes, we were not as we are now, but we were double creatures, resembling perhaps two modern humans standing back-to-back with their limbs stretched out in parallel: everyone had two faces (on either side of a single head), two sets of genitals, four legs and four arms, and moved quickly by tumbling along. There were three kinds of 'doubles': male, female, and mixed. (Hunter 2004, 62)

These 'bi-face' humans were then split in two by Zeus as a punishment for aiming too high, becoming too powerful, and presenting a challenge to the gods. Zeus' 'castration' left amputated, deformed figures ever harbouring a sense of loss and lack – which offers one explanation for human desire. Aristophanes declares, '*erôs* is the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole' (192e10).[15] These disempowered and deformed half-lings then wandered in a desperate search for their 'other halves', and when they found them became locked in an embrace as they tried to reunite, an effort which always failed and resulted in

[15] All line references are from Robin Waterfield's 1994 translation of the *Symposium*.

death. Zeus then took pity, and turned genitals around so that the embrace of the man-woman would result in copulation and procreation, thus ensuring the continuation of the race, and the production of workers for the gods. When the male-male and female-female embraced there would be physical satisfaction after which they would be ready to return to work. Thus both Zeus's punishment and merciful act in creating sex and reproduction as compensation or consolation are an exercise of power and control, motivated by the need to subdue superior beings and keep them reproductive and productive in order better to serve the gods.[16]

Although the central proposition of Aristophanes' speech is rejected or revised in the Symposium by Socrates' subsequent speech, Richard Hunter highlights the enduring fascination this originary tale of desire, sex and sexuality has held over western culture in the centuries ever since, which underlines the attractiveness of the idea (2004, 68). It also presents us with the idea of a 'third term', a hybrid, hermaphrodite being in which male and female elements combine and co-exist in a single superior, powerful whole human, one whose hybridity is amputated in order to cut them down to size or diminish their ambition and potential. *Conte'*s Ivan and Ylane present – at the height of their love affair – a dark fairytale reworking of this bi-face being, uniting sexes in one doubled creature. The fraternal characterisation of their bond emphasises how in its original form the hermaphrodite male-female was not about procreation, this element being added by Zeus as a consolation for failed re-union, and not central to their original morphology.

*Conte'*s biface lovers experience a period of contentment and *complétude* and their love flourishes in the liminal space of the asylum set apart from the *logos* and the real world. However, their fragile 'passion dans la nef des fous' (CAB 53) cannot survive outside the asylum and back inside the social world. The Symbolic cannot tolerate or support this union, and Zeus's punishment threatens to split them, transforming their hermaphroditic symbiosis into a banal sexual pairing resembling any average couple. It is a threat they anticipate:

[16] See Richard Hunter (2004) for a full elaboration of the speech, its context within the Symposium and the enduring nature of Aristophanes' split-self fable. Freud draws on it in *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) to discuss sexuality, and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) for his theory of the death drive. Lacan's conceptions of human drives, desire, and sexuality also develop via the myth. Freud's use is somewhat awkward, and while the idea of a 'split self' and originary separation remained central for Lacan, his conception of desire moves away from the myth in that for him it can never achieve a 'happy end', because as Malcolm Bowie puts it, 'each anticipated moment of plenitude brings with it a new vacancy' (1991, 137-8).

> Tout avait été possible dans l'enceinte du pavillon. Dès qu'ils en franchiraient la porte, *ils formeraient un couple comme il en existait tant*, avec cette différence qu'ils se savaient l'un et l'autre inaptes à la vie normale. Leur île déserte leur serait enlevée. C'était comme si on leur avait accordé cette récréation, mais que bientôt l'heure des obligations allait sonner, les ramenant à la réalité. (CAB 55; my emphasis)

In efforts to resist the world and its threat to their union, they vow to replicate the insulating, isolating *bagne* of the asylum in Ylane's apartment, 'en ignorant tout de l'extérieur, en s'aimant dans le total refus du monde. Mais ils pressentaient qu'un jour le couperet tomberait, tranchant net ce fil magique' (CAB 55-6). The sword falls, the magic thread slowly stretches and finally severs not long after their departure from the asylum: 'C'était comme s'ils avaient vécu un conte, un conte pour enfants, et les voilà tout à coup projetés dans le monde adulte' (93). Again, unlike the classic fairytale mode, the severance from childhood and projection into the adult world fails, and is not accompanied by a 'retour' or conclusive homecoming for either Ylane or Ivan. It entails severance from each other once more, and projection not into adulthood, but back into *errance.*

This renewed separation is ambivalent, and read through the *Symposium* it can be seen as presenting potential and possibility, even if it represents another step on an incomplete journey for the characters as for Lê as an author. The *Symposium* presents Aristophanes inviting his audience to imagine that Hephaestus offered to re-fuse the split creatures into one and allow them to die as a single person (thus immortalising their symbiosis), suggesting that:

> It's obvious that none of them would refuse this offer; we'd find them all accepting it. There wouldn't be the slightest doubt in any of their minds that what Hephaestus had said was what they'd been wanting all along, to be joined and fused with the one they love, to be one instead of two. (192b7-e9)

Hunter examines the nature of the happiness afforded by the fusion Hephaestus offers, '[It is] some kind of blissful trance in which there is no obvious role for the intellect or improvement of the individual (who will of course no longer exist) or the body politic at large, except insofar as the practice of piety is helpful to the state' (2004, 69). Conformity and obedience are achieved through the consolation of this blissful union, and there is certainly no shortage of

support for the argument that the modern rom-com genre, marketing the bliss of fairytale love and union, presents an incredibly effective source of appeasement and distraction from the disgruntlements of everyday life for millions – even billions – of consumers of western popular culture.

Feminism constantly reassesses and challenges these kinds of cultural consolations, and in my view Lê's writing implicitly, and perhaps relatively unconsciously, forms part of that challenging reassessment. The fantasy of sexual (re)union distracts and deters from intellectual and political engagement, and from individual self-determination. The 'fused' double/couple will be compliant and docile servants of the state. The drive to reunify is a distraction from rebellion, the promise of blissful union a reward proffered to deter rebellious agitation. Hunter points out that 'opening up Aristophanes' double-people brings us diminution and loss, not revelation. Happiness, *eudaimonia*, is crucial, but we should be searching not for the lost half of ourselves, *but inside what we already have*' (Hunter 71; my emphasis). This realisation of the importance of not looking outside to another, but inside what we carry in ourselves, takes on greater significance later in this chapter when we turn to Lê's *À l'enfant*.

The rejection of this blissful, blinding union is exactly what *Conte* stages, quite explicitly, in a very clear progression of plot. The focus on the two-faced quality of this form of union is underlined by its inclusion in the title of *Conte de l'amour bifrons*, and the meaning here operates on a number of levels. Firstly, it can be seen to relate to Aristophanes' 'bi-face' creatures. Secondly, *bifrons* speaks of the ambivalence of this union, paradoxical in its effect on the individuals involved, being both life-giving and offering rebirth and plenitude, yet also involving an erasure of the self and of individuality and the sentient pursuit of knowledge. During the period of happiness their couple enjoys, Ivan and Ylane each perform roles enabling or conveying the communication of others, but neither produces their own 'language' or literature. Ylane returns to her job as a telephone operator, and Ivan works as a courrier, then a bookseller, facilitating the traffic of the letters and writings of others.

The gradual disintegration of their union can be seen to result from its very all-consuming nature. As their life as a couple progresses, it is Ivan in particular who grows increasingly dissatisfied and strains at the bonds holding him to Ylane. He knows he has escaped madness thanks to her, but he fears to 'disparaître en elle' (CAB 62) and pines for the company of others. He now fears the *gémeillité* that saved him and refuses Ylane's identification of him

with Dylan. He begins to yearn for creative life and social existence, 'l'assurance d'être quelqu'un' (86), and he resents the stifling aridity of their domestic life in which he cannot find the inspiration or creative force to write, 'Je suis devenu sec, stérile, se disait Ivan' (CAB 85). He begins to avoid Ylane and flee their home. For Ylane, Ivan is everything and her social and psychological existence appears to depend on and flow through him. During their relationship, she exists cut off from the rest of the world: 'On aurait dit qu'elle avait mis une clôture autour d'elle et planté une pancarte sur laquelle elle aurait écrit Propriété privée (sic)' (88). Their love is a dazzling fantasy that temporarily saves, but does not cure or offer social and linguistic existence based on self-determination, or what they already had inside.

Ylane recognises Ivan's sense of suffocation and frees him of his tie to her (CAB 109), but after they separate, her sanity, and her very existence, falter again, and she finds herself back in the asylum. The hospital, which in Ivan's company was 'un lieu magique' now takes on a very different countenance and is 'un endroit effrayant [...] une plante carnivore' where the patients are like trapped flies (CAB 115). Ylane almost resigns herself to being 'destinée à être broyée par la machine psychiatrique' (116).[17] However, she resists this temptation to concede defeat through a crucial process of self-awareness and self-realisation:

> Je croyais qu'en rencontrant Ivan, j'échapperais à l'asile. Me voici de retour dans cette chambre, où je suis comme en prison. Je suis mon propre geôlier. J'ai mis des chaînes invisibles qui me retiennent au lit. Mes jambes sont faibles parce que je ne veux pas qu'elles me portent. (CAB 118)

Ylane here realises her own part in her situation, and the extent to which her own will is what can free or imprison her. She fights to resist the seductive grip of this flesh-eating 'Dionée', the consuming plant of madness and asylum: 'Si je m'approche de ses franges, les longs cils se refermeront sur moi et je serai broyée. Non, je ne suis pas folle, je me suis juste égarée dans un long labyrinthe. Il faut que je trouve l'issue' (119). Although Ivan reappears to resume the role of saviour, Ylane is now suspicious and reluctant to trust in the salvational power of either Ivan or the asylum, as she has lost faith in both. Ivan is forced to confront his failure to save her. He too is again in crisis and revisited by hallucinations of his father, his 'agents' and the 'meute de chiens' (CAB 126).

[17] We note the echoes of the Santosian characterisation of a mechanising, dehumanising asylum.

Ylane does find the 'issue' and leaves the asylum, and it is mainly the fear of returning there that motivates her to live a semblance of normality. She saves herself through examining and drawing from 'inside what she already has' to paraphrase Hunter. Ivan, having always been characterised by a Lêian *errance*, feels the pull to wander again: 'L'envie de vagabondage l'avait repris' (CAB 98). He throws off all ties of physical anchorage and leaves the shores of France to embark on a life at sea, literally, working as a sailor and 'il cherchait à s'échapper vers quelque chose d'indéfinissable' (107). We could see this return to the fluid and the ineffable as a return to the maternal, or the Kristevan semiotic. Ivan leaves Ylane a letter in which he expresses the hope that his travels and 'le dépaysement fera de moi un autre homme [...] digne de toi' (145). He is propelled on his 'fuite en avant' by the mantra '*Va tu ne sais où et rapporte tu ne sais quoi*' repeated throughout the novel.

Six months after Ivan's departure, Ylane is described apparently on the verge of suicide, once more 'guettée par la folie' in a darkened room with a bottle of pills, 'Elle pense au suicide comme à un passage, elle doit franchir la ligne blanche et ne jamais revenir' (CAB 147). However, she retains some faith in the possibility of renewal in this life, and she appears to find the hope she is desperately seeking in two lines of Chinese poetry, which appear determinate in her decision not to take her life. She too leaves the room and the diegesis, and with a determined step '[e]lle va elle ne sait où rapporter elle ne sait quoi' (CAB 149). She embarks on her own voyage of (self)discovery, into the *inconnu* that is *not* death. That the source of inspiration or strength for Ylane, at this critical moment, should come from the poetic indicates a valorisation of this mode of language in Lê's writing. As we saw previously, poetry is the dominant mode in Vietnamese culture and Lê's own style draws deeply from the poetic. Whether we call it the semiotic or the poetic, for Lê it is essential to literature.

*Conte'*s ending is highly unresolved and ambiguous. It is true that Ylane escapes suicide, escapes the asylum and escapes the loss of self implicated in a fusional bond. However, it is far less clear that she has definitively escaped madness, and (as with the optimistic end of *Lettre morte*) it is perhaps questionable how convincing the sudden positive turn at the novel's conclusion is, in light of the crisis overwhelming the female character and the text up to the final few lines. Ylane may leave 'd'un pas vif' (CAB 149), but she has no clear idea of where she is going, and returns to the now familiar *errance*. Linda Lê is adamant that Ylane's attitude here is optimistic, and affirms that 'elle prend son propre chemin, c'est très positif, elle est indépendante, elle a quitté l'asile, elle assume sa vie' (Personal interview 2013). This

may be so, but the Antigone thematics dominating Lê's subsequent three novels cast a retrospective shadow on Ylane's independent journey into the unknown. Lê's very next text, *In memoriam,* opens with female suicide, the suicide of a putatively mad female writer, the central female protagonist, Sola, who is cast as an Antigone, and it is to this we now turn.

L'Organisation exige un nouveau sacrifice: The Antigone Trilogy

With the Oedipal parental structure troubled, and the children orphaned and wandering, we might ask along with Butler, what happens to the heirs of Oedipus? In her feminist re-reading of the Antigone myth, *Antigone's Claim*, Butler asks, 'If the stability of the maternal place cannot be secured, and neither can the stability of the paternal, what happens to Oedipus and the interdiction for which he stands? What has Oedipus engendered?' (2000, 22). The crisis of kinship for which Antigone stands as allegory bears renewed and greater relevance in our contemporary globalised context and particularly in the context of the exilic literature of writers such as Linda Lê. As Butler points out:

> [We live] during a time in which children, because of divorce and remarriage, because of migration, exile and refugee status, because of global displacements of various kinds, move from one family to another, move from a family to no family [...] this is a time in which kinship has become fragile, porous and expansive. (ibid.)

This is very much the context of production for Lê's writing and her Antigone trilogy.

The Lê texts discussed thus far have been dominated by madness and *attempted* suicide, and the trilogy I turn to now is also marked by the presence of central female characters, each a writing woman in one way or another, who suffer, or have suffered, from some form of madness or who have carried out suicide in a form of protest framed in Antigonal terms. Here the focus on madness shifts to a focus on a self-sacrificial form of suicide. Lê's fascination with classic mythology, what she describes as 'les mythes fondateurs' (Personal interview 2012), feeds into all her writing, and her texts are often structured by the influence of one or even several mythological intertexts. These are not superficial references included as an intellectual pretention and they always have symbolic contextual significance. The figure of Antigone is a particularly dominant example, and the Antigone myth, drawn principally from Sophocles'

canonical version, becomes a central structuring intertext reworked *in amplificatio* in the triptych *In memoriam* (2007), *Cronos* (2010) and *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* (2011). The suicide attempted repeatedly in numerous earlier texts is carried out in *In memoriam* and *Cronos*, and Antigone embodies the sacrifice of the self demanded by the agents of the superego-like *Organisation* in *Voix*. Kristeva states in *Women's Time*, 'The new generation of women is showing that its major social concern has become *the socio-symbolic contract as a sacrificial contract*' (1986, 200; my emphasis), and Lê's later works and her recourse to the Antigone myth appear to bear this out. What we see sacrificed through the metonymical suicide of Lê's Antigones are the figure of the *femme de lettres* and the maternal potential of the female author.

Antigone is a – perhaps *the* – paradigmatic mad, bad girl of western culture, the righteous rebel female *par excellence*. Steiner's comprehensive study, *Antigones* (1984), demonstrates the vast influence of Sophocles' *Antigone* on western art, culture and thought.[18] Steiner attests to Antigone's universality and the political content of the play that Antigone embodies. Her defiant refusal of man's law has shaped philosophical systems of thought by Hegel, Goethe, Hölderlin, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, and has inspired plays and rewritings by Brecht, Anouilh, and many others. It has also inspired women writers from as early as Christine de Pisan's late thirteenth-century *Cent Histoyres de Troie* and more recently in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Marguerite Yourcenar's *Feux* and Charlotte Delbo's *Des Milles Antigones*. Post-Freudian psychoanalysis has also made Antigone a target of interpretation and a source of debate. The ambivalence inherent in the legend, the fate of Antigone as a result of her defiant act, gives rise to a schism between, on the one hand, Lacan and Lacanian thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek and Alenka Zupancic who subscribe to Lacan's view (expressed mainly in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* and *Encore*) of the death-driven act as one of 'radical passivity', and on the other hand, Butler's far more positive reading of the myth as empowering and potentially subversive.[19]

As Steiner affirms, 'Sophocles' *Antigone* is not "any text". It is one of the enduring and canonic acts in the history of our philosophic, literary, political consciousness' (1984 Preface) and he adds, 'Since the fifth century BC, western sensibility has experienced decisive moments

[18] Steiner's work is a source of constant reference for Lê, as she confirmed in a personal communication in October 2013. Steiner does not examine the feminist potential of Antigone, which is more fully engaged with by Mitchell in *Siblings* and Butler in *Antigone's Claim*.

[19] See Alison Hugill (2011) for a relatively concise elaboration of the key elements of this debate.

of its identity and history in reference to the Antigone legend [...] Overwhelmingly, it has felt women in the face of arbitrary power and of death to be [...] "les Antigones de la terre"' (ibid., 109). Lê's reworking of the myth invites us to see the turn of the twenty-first century as one such 'decisive moment' in which western sensibility must measure its identity in relation to the legend. This chapter is not the forum for a re-examination of the above debates and rewritings. Our purpose here is to focus on Linda Lê's Antigones and to understand what the myth represents in her texts and what that may offer to our contemporary context. However, the ambivalences within the legend giving rise to such a mass of often-conflicting readings are important and will become relevant later when we come to draw conclusions from Lê's rewritings.

It is important to foreground certain elements of Sophocles' play of particular relevance to this discussion. Although not always the central focus of those drawn to the play's many political and philosophical questions in the millenia since, there is a clear emphasis in the original play on the gender – and we might say proto-feminist – politics. As Antigone's sister Ismene bemoans, political resistance by women is impossible madness: 'O think Antigone; we are women; it is not for us/ To fight against men [...]/ May the dead forgive me, I can do no other/ But as I am commanded; to do more is madness' (Watling 1947, 128).[20] Creon says later, 'We'll have no woman's law here, while I live' (ibid., 140), but Antigone refuses to be silenced or to act in secret, as she wants her resistance to be public and acknowledged, 'Publish it/To all the world! Else I shall hate you more' (Watling 129). She embraces this madness, however much it isolates her, demanding 'Leave me alone with my own madness' (ibid.). Considerable emphasis is placed on the madness of Antigone's behaviour. It is a judgement passed by her supposedly reasonable sister, also by Creon, and accepted by Antigone. By contrast, madness is a judgement that *cannot* be passed on the patriarch, as Haemon says to Creon, 'I could call you mad, were you not my father' (ibid., 147).

Ismene is the obedient, domesticated counterpart to Antigone's mad rebelliousness. The movement of the two even in this opening scene is symbolic, as Ismene 'goes into the Palace' and so returns within, to the seat of power and the domestic space within which she must submit, while Antigone 'leaves the stage by a side exit' (Watling 129). This oblique movement beyond the bounds of power and the domestic is highly evocative of Lê's constant gesturing in

[20] All quotations from Sophocles' *Antigone* are taken from E.F. Watling's 1947 translation and are cited hereafter as 'Watling' with the page number.

her texts towards an *au-delà* or alternative space. Antigone's solitary act of defiance is shown, as the play progresses, to be approved of and supported by the Chorus and she therefore speaks and acts as a sort of proxy for the silent discontented populace, which retrospectively openly approves her stance and her 'honourable action' (ibid., 145), and thus she does acquire some characteristics of a martyr.

There is also considerable emphasis on the fact that Antigone through choosing death escapes marriage (to Creon's son Haemon) and motherhood. The fact that she will never marry is lamented but insisted on, and she says, 'No wedding-day; no marriage-music;/ Death will be all my bridal-dower' (Watling 148) and later, 'Never a bride, never a mother, unfriended/ Condemned alive to solitary death' (ibid., 150), and she is ultimately 'the maid that was married with death' (Watling 158). This is of course crystallised in her name, which etymologically can mean 'opposed to motherhood' or 'anti-generative' from the roots *anti* (against) and *gonē* (that which generates; *gonos* – seed, semen) or also 'unbending' from *gon* (corner, bend). Her refusal is to submit to the authoritarian laws of man, in deference to unwritten laws. By choosing death she ensures she is ever the daughter, the sister and never the mother, never the wife: 'Antigone is a heroic ideal. To be this she has had to renounce marriage and motherhood' (Mitchell 2003, 30). Antigone therefore may be seen to incarnate dissidence, a supposedly mad female rebellion against overweening male authority, self-sacrifice and the refusal of motherhood and marriage.

Lê affirms an enduring fascination with the figure of Antigone. This attraction takes us back to the era of Idealism and Romanticism in European culture, and echoes her own affinity with the German Romantics in particular. Despite insisting that she does not define herself as a feminist (although when pressed she concedes her work reflects 'une attitude féministe' [Personal interview 2013]), Lê accepts that she is preoccupied by major feminine figures of revolt and Antigone in particular:

> Je suis habitée par les grandes figures féminines de la révolte, Antigone par exemple [...] Je crois avoir souvent inventé des personnages féminins qui sont en rupture avec le monde. En général, elles sont seules, sans descendants, elles sont plus des sœurs que des amantes, elles incarnent le refus, refus du pouvoir, refus de la maternité, refus des conventions [...] Ces Antigones perpétuent le geste de l'insoumission. En ce sens, les livres les plus intimistes sont aussi des livres politiques, parce qu'ils disent quelque chose sur ces

> femmes qui sont entrées en dissidence envers le réel [...] J'ai été très tôt subjuguée par la figure d'Antigone. On pourrait ajouter aussi Cassandre, celle qui prophétise et n'est pas entendue. Ces mythes permettent de créer des personnages qui ne pactisent pas, qui ne cèdent pas à la tentation de conclure un traité avec le monde pour trouver leur place. Elles se dressent contre un monde où il faut se soumettre ou se démettre, elles s'affirment contre ce que Simone Weil appelle « les machines à écraser l'humanité ». Elles ont foi en l'humanisme. (Personal Interview 2012)

Lê therefore identifies a political content to her Antigones, who represent political resistance on several levels – Antigone embodies for Lê a refusal of power, a refusal of the *logos*, a refusal of conventions and, we might add, of *gendered* conventions as she also personifies a refusal of conventional compulsory maternity for women. 'Refus' is repeated four times, and this attitude subtends Lê's writing project, which presents a spectral poetics of negation. Antigone stands in opposition to a world where one must submit or resign oneself, but the alternative she offers, or represents, is uncompromisingly fatal. Lê's Antigonal *femmes de lettres* refuse to compromise, and this uncompromising stance leads them, like their avatar, to an *au-delà*, a beyond, and we must question what this Lêian *au-delà* represents. Is it a mute afterlife in death, or is it a powerful rebirth of female creative potential?

We may find answers through examining Lê's Antigones and the texts they shape. *In memoriam* is the first text of the trilogy to feature a female character modelled on Sophocles' heroine. Here she is named Sola, a name given to her by the male (unnamed) narrator and his brother, who are rivals for her affection: 'Nous l'appelions Sola parce qu'elle était solitaire et seule, d'une solitude souveraine' (IM 9). Her name foregrounds her luminary isolation, and the unique individuality of her as heroic ideal. Described as 'cette Antigone' (IM 19), Sola's suicide both opens and closes the spiralling narrative. She is always-already dead, and her spectral presence haunts the text as it haunts the male narrator who writes this grieving testament in memory of her ghost (just as the female narrator of *Lettre morte* wrote her epistolary monument to her father's ghost). We read the account of her life produced by the narrator, and at no point do we have direct, unmediated access to Sola's thoughts, feelings or motivations. According to this account, Sola finds herself caught in a rivalry between the narrator himself and his brother Thomas, who have always been fierce enemies, and are easily identifiable with the legend's pair of brothers Polyneices and Etiocles.

The daughter of an Iranian immigrant father (who has probably also committed suicide) and a French mother, Sola is an accomplished, successful writer. The narrator, by contrast, is a struggling writer crippled socially by a stuttering inability to speak or assert himself and searching for focus and inspiration. He falls in love with Sola's writing before falling in love with the woman herself, and he sees her as his 'double féminin' (IM 72) and desires her as a Eurydice who will be the wife and muse to his poetic Orpheus. He has romanticised her madness and her writing, which he valorizes over the woman herself: 'J'avais cru entendre, en la lisant, une voix échappée de l'indispensable nef des fous, traversée cependant par des éclairs de lucidité frondeuse' (IM 67).[21] For him, it is the access she grants to mystic, cosmic truths that make her desirable as a symbiotic partner in a relationship of symbolic jumellism, as he says 'elle était la part qui m'avait toujours manqué. Ce que j'avais tu [...] elle l'avait exprimé' (84). In keeping with the separation of the couple in *Conte,* Sola resists this symbiosis, 'J'étais son jumeau, lui avais-je dit une nuit [...] Elle m'avait détrompé: d'après elle, nous ne nous ressemblions *pas du tout*. Mon rêve de toujours, celui de m'allier à un alter ego, s'évanouissait' (IM 14) and 'Elle semblait ne s'attacher qu'à demi, non par tiédeur, mais parce que ma façon, vorace, de la vouloir toute à moi l'effrayait' (127).

The narrator's brother Thomas presents an antithetical character of manhood. A bullying authoritarian, he is described as 'le roc' (IM 102) and 'le pilier' (35). The narrator is 'le petit bafouilleur' (100) while Thomas is 'le baratineur' (99), a socially and sexually successful *lawyer* who steps in to replace the weak, absent father in Sola's life. If the narrator wants Sola as his muse, Thomas wants to make her a mother:

> Il avait exprimé le désir d'avoir un enfant d'elle. Elle avait répondu non, calmement – à croire que ce *non* tranché était constitutif de son être. Non, non, non, avait-elle répété à Thomas, médusé devant une telle détermination. Elle n'ajouta aucune explication et se mura dans le silence. Il devait me dire, après la mort de Sola, qu'il avait eu l'impression d'avoir touché un nerf sensible. (IM 176)[22]

[21] We note here the relationship between madness and a form of alternative lucidity giving access to higher truths than conventional logic, offering echoes of Beauvoir's *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue* in particular.

[22] The influence on *In memoriam* of the Hebrew legend of Lilith, first wife of the Biblical Adam, who also refuses motherhood offered by Adam and God, is discussed by Loucif (2009a), where she also points out that Thomas means 'twin' in Aramaic, therefore providing yet another potential, though refused, double for Sola.

Thomas has no interest in Sola's intellectual creative powers, and this is a source of sadness for her. His efforts to be 'l'homme qui la rendrait à cette féminité qu'elle refusait' (ibid.) fail repeatedly. As Averis notes, Thomas tries to project his desire for maternity onto Sola, 'il avait essayé de graver ceci dans son esprit: elle ne se reconcilierait pas avec elle-même tant qu'elle ne serait pas mère' (IM 184), and we see how 'she shies away from this imposed role which is already fulfilled for her through writing and literature' (Averis 2011, 217).

However much she is drawn to both brothers, and seduced by their very different qualities, in the end she rejects the offers of union, and the conceptions of womanhood and femininity, offered by both men, and this casts new light on the unicity implicit her name. Although the causal nexus is left very ambiguous, the experience of having to reject both men appears to push Sola into a catatonic state.[23] She isolates herself in aphasia, and the reference above to Antigone's self-entombment is clear, 'elle se mura dans le silence', and Sola is caught at this point in a living death before her actual death in suicide, just as Antigone was trapped in the living death of the cave's tomb before her own suicide. Sola's ambition as a writer is to subvert and resist, 'Elle devait s'user les yeux à décrypter ces messages d'outre-tombe jusqu'à ce qu'elle n'eût plus qu'une visée: être écrivain, prendre à son tour la parole pour secouer les fondations de la morale conformiste' (IM 136). However the narrator warns that, 'un tel écrit ne pouvait que mener à la déroute mentale' (81-2). Daring to subvert, to rebel, and to '[p]ublish!' as Antigone did, leads to madness. If we see the two male figures in Kristevan terms as personifications of linguistic dispositions, we can easily read the poetic narrator who struggles to produce language as a semiotic figure, while Thomas is strongly identified with the thetic certainty and legality of the Symbolic.[24] Sola, having rejected *both* linguistic dispositions, is left without language, without Symbolic powers or semiotic abilities of movement or feeling, and is catatonic and aphasic. Seeing no way back *into language* (i.e. into logos, sanity, communication) as a solitary female un-attached to either 'brother', her only escape is apparently into death.

Lê's reworking offers a potential contradiction of the legend. Antigone was adamant that her act be public and published, 'she speaks, and speaks in public, precisely when she ought to

[23] There also appears to be a sense that Sola is cursed by her father's malediction, and his diary bears this curse metonymically into her life, as she re-reads it constantly and it resurfaces somewhat mysteriously shortly before her death.

[24] Kristeva's insistence that the semiotic and Symbolic dispositions are mutually necessary to the signifying process is worth recalling in light of the rivalry and later *rapprochement* between the brothers.

be sequestered in the private domain' (Butler 2000, 4). This means that her act of martyrdom will have left its mark on the Symbolic: 'Although Antigone dies, her deed remains in language' (ibid. 24). Sola, by contrast, destroys her final manuscript shortly before destroying herself by hanging. Having walled herself into silence as Antigone was walled into the cave, Sola does *not* leave the Symbolic trace of her defiance in language. This is done by a combination of the brothers. Thomas has been chosen by Sola to physically witness her dead body, as she arranges for him to visit soon after her suicide, and the task of transposing this death into language falls to the male narrator, whose narrative is the text he writes 'in memoriam' as a linguistic testament to the female author, a narrative that wraps itself shroud-like around the woman's ghost, simultaneously laying her to rest and resurrecting her in spectral form. Ultimately, of course, it is Linda Lê who writes the narrative-of-the-narrative, and the element of sublimation involved in this act is what we will return to when assessing the ethical effect of Lê's Antigones when read together.

For Hegel, Antigone stands for the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal rule, because the mother's law (i.e. Antigone's law of family duty etc.) is defeated to make way for Creon's rule. Sola's death in *In memoriam* does appear to leave the way clear for male rule, as the previously-warring brothers come together to care for Sola while she is catatonic. Considerable narrative space is earlier devoted to descriptions of the brothers' characters and the enmity between them for most of their lives, yet following Sola's death they form what Landrot sees as 'une dangeureuse fusion' (2007), perhaps because it implies the narrator has come under the control of the patriarchal bully, but the consequences are unclear in the text. The narrator admits that Sola has drawn them closer, 'L'ironie voulut que mon frère [...] me devînt plus proche: il était capable d'un sentiment qui le rendait tributaire des miens. Nous étions plus que des rivaux, nous croyions tous deux en Sola' (IM 162). Their *rapprochement* becomes increasingly emphatic, and in the final section, following her death, they are referred to insistently with the first person plural, 'nous', which appears eight times in thirteen lines. Brotherhood is restored at the expense of the sister, the female is expunged. As Mitchell remarks, 'The masculine unity is achieved at the cost of expelling the feminine as other or different. Brothers cast out sisters or the feminine from their make-up' (2003, 4). If we consider the trajectory of movement, the *errance* so prevalent and characteristic of Lê's writing elsewhere appears here to be arrested, stuck in the Antigonal cave where the

female/feminine author is walled up in silence. The crisis of authority and authorship has not been resolved.

The bleakness of *In memoriam* is deepened in the nightmarish narrative of *Cronos* (2010), where the Antigone intertext is amplified in what is perhaps the most explicitly political of Lê's novels. She elegantly and innovatively reweaves elements of the legend to produce a strikingly original novel burning with hatred and a breathtaking violence, yet also singing of love, loyalty and the heart-breaking poignant tragedy of the heroine's self-sacrifice. Here the Antigonal character, Una (again, named to highlight her singularity, and now also her universality) has been forced into marriage by and with the hyperbolically brutal and bloodthirsty Karaci, who has threatened the life of her dementia-ridden but adored father. Antigone is the future daughter-in-law of Creon, betrothed to his son Haemon, but Una is the unwilling wife of the Creon figure here. Una is literally a *femme de lettres*, she writes letters to an absent, beloved brother-figure (and another male alter ego), the poet Andréas, and each alternate chapter of the novel's decalogue is one of these letters, intercut with a more omniscient and anonymous third-person narrative. In a truly hybrid, two-tone novel, the alternation of narrative voice sets up an antithesis between the public, political 'masculine' world of Karaci, whose psyche we gain access to through the use of *style indirect libre,* and the more private, personal and domestic 'feminine' world of Una, who is effectively under house arrest and confined to one room of the palace, reminiscent of Sophocles' 'within/The proper place for women' (Watling 142).

Karaci is viciously authoritarian in his role as enforcer of law in the dystopic megopolis, Zaroffcity, where he oversees massacres and summary executions, and vies with the dictator, 'le Grand Guide', for ultimate control. The populace is cowed, silent, disaffected but defeated, reminiscent of Sophocles' Chorus early in the play. While Karaci's world is cruel, cold-blooded and corrupt, Una's room is a place of empathy, tenderness, selfless asceticism and devoted love. Lê presents the extreme poles of human behaviour, from cruel bestiality to compassionate humanity, and this is one of the fault-lines along which the Antigone myth operates – the rituals (burial) of family, love and loyalty that elevate the human from the bestial. Una is devoted to her father and to the eleven-year-old boy Marko, an innocent, brotherly (though not blood brother) character who doubles as a younger reincarnation of the absent and silent Andréas (who is apparently safe in the utopian neighbouring state of Satoripolis where the benign and incorruptible Salomon rules). When Marko is murdered by

Karaci's henchmen and left to rot unburied, Una defiantly buries his body. Following the murder of the innocent boy (the Polyneices figure), this Una-Antigone surreptitiously but actively plots with revolutionaries to overthrow Karaci's regime by assassinating him herself, an act presented as obviously suicidal and 'un acte de folie' (C 152). She fails and Karaci retains power. He sentences Una to death, along with the unborn son she carries by another man, who is designated only by the letter X. The latter is her fellow revolutionary and a writer who gave up fiction to become a politically-engaged pamphleteer, thus using language for revolutionary purposes, favouring 'une guerre d'usure, où les mots tiendront lieu d'armes (C 102). For Una, in the end, this velvet revolution of words is too slow and ineffective, and she turns to action, refusing to flee to safety with X in favour of defying Karaci and attempting her seemingly hopeless revolution.

Una refuses biological motherhood in choosing martyrdom, however she is quite explicitly traced as a very *socially maternal* character throughout the novel. She mothers Marko, feeding and watching over him like a son; she is described feeling maternal towards her senile father in a reversal of familial roles; and she feels a maternal responsibility towards Karaci's many victims. When Marko is killed, this social maternity is aborted prematurely, which hardens her revolutionary resolve. It is immediately following this 'abortion' of maternity that we learn that Una is in fact biologically pregnant with X's son, and this makes her even more determined to overthrow Karaci. Following her failed assassination attempt, Karaci offers a reprieve if she aborts the pregnancy, which she refuses to do and so once more she chooses a martyr's death.

Una's actions are a series of rejections of union with male partners, *culminating in a refusal to be separated from the male she carries within*. She refuses the imposed union with the patriarchal male, and also the amorous sexual union with the revolutionary literary male, X, and refuses both to (re)produce the son or to abort this male within, this ultimate male internalised alter ego. Una has drawn strength from the beloved men around her, as she tells Andréas, 'L'amour que je te porte, celui que j'ai pour Marko, pour père, pour X, ont été des contrepoisons à la résignation' (C 160), yet they are lost or left as she sits alone in her condemned cell. This leaves a solitary female figure eternally pregnant with a male son as the text closes. He is for her 'mon fils, dont je n'accoucherai pas' (C 164) and the seed of the following text, Lê's letter *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas*, is sown. Returning to Sophocles, Antigone's most decisive victory over Creon is in her depriving him of a line of inheritance, as

her action results in his son's death and the foreclosure of any future sons. Watling highlights how, in the context of the play's production, 'the king's final humiliation and chastening, through the loss of his son, is of higher dramatic significance than the fate of the woman' (1947, 14).

For Lê, the greater significance evidently lies in the revolutionary potential of the literary martyrdom enacted here. In contrast to *In memoriam,* Una's final act as she awaits death in her ('heimlich') cell is to write to Andréas, to leave a trace in language. Una explains her response to Karaci's offer to commute her sentence:

> Plutôt crever, lui ai-je dit. J'irai jusqu'au terme de mon calvaire, car alors mon sacrifice s'inscrira dans les mémoires, les évènements de ces quelques jours auront des prolongements. Zaroffcity, pépinière de contestataires que d'autres factions irrigueront, se réveillera de son coma, des voix s'élèveront quand la nôtre se sera éteinte. (C 163)

This establishes the utter sacrificiality of the act. Una's death is necessary to inspire others. We note with 'la nôtre' the use of the singular definite article with the plural possessive pronoun, meaning 'our voice' and implying the symbiosis of mother and foetal son who now 'share' a voice, or otherwise put, the female (non-mother) and the never-to-be-born son now combine to produce the one voice.

The efficacy of Una's sacrifice, however, is not entirely convincing, and to the reader her optimism appears rather idealistically utopian than realistically grounded. She uses the future tense to predict how X will lead an attack to overthrow Karaci, but this future certainty is undermined by the grave uncertainty immediately preceding it in her letter. Karaci has scuppered the revolutionaries' plans and murdered or arrested most of the agitants, with the notable exception of X. The latter carries the hopes for any future uprising, but Una's rhetoric earlier on when considering what X might do is marked by the interrogative and cast in serious doubt (C 154-5). She also describes how Karaci has exploited the gutter press to publicise the total failure of Una's audacious act and quash rebellious sentiment: 'Pas un n'osera le défier après le coup de filet qui a mis un frein à l'élan d'espérance' (C 161). When projecting an imagining of the son she would have had, with all his talents, wisdoms, creativity and potential as a perfect combination of herself and X, the conditional perfect tense proclaims his pre-emptive impossibility (158-9). Although she is 'confiante', ultimately Una admits, 'ces

conjectures atténuent mon déchirement au moment des adieux' (C 164; my emphasis). She will be the sacrificed woman, only her name 'Una', meaning in the simplest sense 'one woman', to be engraved on her tombstone, and 'Je serai le monolithe de l'imperturbabilité' (ibid.). The novel closes with the lines, 'Ces pages ne sont pas le testament d'une défaitiste [...] demain les guetteurs verront se lever une nouvelle aube' (C 164). If, as I have argued, the dawn imagined by Lê a decade earlier with *Lettre morte* and *Les Aubes* was a false dawn, we must examine the optimism of this later Lêian dawn.

A profound ambivalence operates between the subversive, revolutionary utopianism and the self-negating sacrifice here. The position of the woman writer may appear inescapably bleak at the close of these two texts, *In memoriam* and *Cronos*, all future for her own self foreclosed. Condemned, entombed, a scape-goated martyr whose death may – *may* – enable the male writer to achieve a revolution through her spectral renaissance in writing. Una writes, *'Je t'écris d'une cellule nue*, je suis assise sur le sol, un bloc-notes sur mes genoux' (C 153; my emphasis), and we are taken back to the words of Emma Santos. We might wonder how far we have come from Santos' 'une fille folle nue écrit dans une chambre nue' (LI 7), from the woman, struggling to achieve self-determination, self-discovery and self-*authority* in language, imprisoned (and self-imprisoned) in the asylum. And how far from the madwoman imprisoned in the attic and leaping sacrificially from the roof of Thornfield Hall. With Sola and Una we find the woman writer once more in *idios*, isolated, exiled, entombed in a cell of her own choosing and condemned by her own revolutionary audacity to a martyr's death.

Lê, therefore, arguably reproduces the ambivalence of the legend that led to the opposing readings referred to earlier. Antigone may challenge the autocratic Law of the Father, whose offence is the failure to observe the religious ritual that elevates man from the bestial to the human, yet being a woman in the ethic and politics of the legend, Antigone never truly presents a challenge in herself, and it is *only* through her sacrifice that Creon's authority is undermined. It is her *sacrifice*, the effacement or eradication of the self, and not her *language* or expression of the self, that has political efficacy or social consequence. Although Butler highlights the subversive nature of Antigone's act of speech, it is not this speech that undermines Creon, whose power senses its limit only with her death. It is in this way Lacan can argue that her act can be understood 'to border the spheres of the imaginary and the symbolic and to figure the inauguration of the symbolic, the sphere of laws and norms that govern the accession to speech and speakability (Butler 2000, 3). Female *jouissance* operates

to *mark the limit of man's law*, performing the quasi-religious sacrifice instantiating the Symbolic. It does not inaugurate a 'woman's law'. Kristeva recognizes contemporary women's 'desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract from their shoulders' (1986, 207), and the question facing us is whether Lê's Antigonal thematics reflect this desire or reiterate this female sacrifice and reinstate the phallogocentric Symbolic and the Law of the Father.

Linda Lê insists that for her Antigone is unquestionably positive, an empowering figure of resistance, 'C'est la grande figure de la révolte. C'est vrai qu'elle se laisse condamner, mais c'est un défi plus qu'une résignation' (Personal interview 2013). And for many, including Bacholle-Bošković, Lê's writing on the whole is transgressive, 'elle perturbe l'ordre établi et rompt avec l'autorité' (2006, 7-8). But just how productively rebellious is this recourse to the great heroine of Romanticism? Is it more idealistic and utopian? Evaluating the emblematic influence of Antigone on the post-Revolutionary Enlightenment programme of female emancipation, Steiner concludes that 'the evidence is thin' and that while 'the rhetoric of liberation was sonorous; the practice almost wholly conservative' with the reality being the imposition of more stringent restraints on 'feminine behaviour and intellectual nurture' (1984, 10). He concludes:

> Thus there is the suspicion that the exaltation of Sophocles' heroine after 1790 is, in some degree, a surrogate for reality. Philosophers, poets, political thinkers acclaim an act of feminine grandeur and echo the affirmation of certain feminine principles over civic power and expediency. But they do so *en fausse situation*: in the knowledge, remorseful and/or complacent, that the contract offered in 1789 had not been observed at all or only marginally. Antigone belongs, hauntingly but safely, to the idiom of the ideal. (ibid.)

Despite the ambiguity opened up by the optimistic prolepse of Una's declaration at the close of *Cronos*, Karaci remains in power, just as at the close of *In memoriam* following Sola's death the male (ruling) alliance is re-established.

Nonetheless, we must consider that there is a divergence in the effect of the myth's reworking for the reader and the woman writer Linda Lê herself. While the reader experiences the impact of the bleakness, the suicide, and the defeat, the writer experiences the *sublimation* involved in the writing of these things. Lê agrees that her Antigones are a form of

sublimatory protective fantasy, 'le fait d'écrire, de créer et d'imaginer des femmes qui se suicident me libère du besoin de faire pareil' (Personal interview 2013), and that this enables her to surmount these feelings and survive. Sara Leek, analysing the potential for scriptotherapy, the healing of madness and trauma through writing as envisaged in Lê, points out that writing, in the narrative exegesis of this novel, does not offer *healing* (Leek 2012). Leek rightly highlights how *In memoriam*'s narrator interprets Sola's writing, 'Ses livres [...] fouillaient cette plaie' (IM 131), recalling Lê's conception of writing as 'remuer le couteau dans la plaie' as we saw in the previous chapter. Leek concludes that, for Sola, 'writing is a temporary fix which can delay death for a time, but, ultimately, it does not heal her wounded mind [...] there exist for her only two alternatives: writing or death' (2012, 252). Leek's analysis is convincing and accurate in so far as it relates to Sola and to the curative powers of writing. However, her analysis is confined to the diegetic level, considering the representation of writing as therapy or cure, and stops short of considering the extra-diegetic salvatory, or sublimatory, effect of writing for the actual *author* Lê herself. We recall how Lê does not profess a faith in the healing or curative power of writing, 'je ne crois pas en la vertu thérapeutique de l'écriture [...] car l'écriture légitime la maladie au lieu de la réduire' (Loucif 2007, 883), yet does consider that writing has the power to save, stating later in the same interview, 'Les livres, les miens comme ceux des autres, m'ont sauvée. J'ai toujours une conception de l'écriture salvatrice' (892). Writing may not be healing, but it may have the potential to save. The narrator of *In memoriam*, engaged in producing the hypo-diegetic narrative-within-the-narrative, declares at the start, 'je serais devenu fou si je n'avais pas écrit ce livre' (IM 7) and that 'Si je ne m'étais pas mis à l'ouvrage tout de suite, j'aurais été bon pour l'asile' (20), and that writing had helped to prevent, 'l'envie de me trancher la gorge' (IM 7). It is, however, with Lê's third Antigone narrative, *À l'enfant*, that sublimation and cure appear to combine most effectively.

Autogenographic Transcendence of Myth and Madness

Defiance or Self-defeat? There is another term, another text, another sacrifice to add, which points to the possibility of *transcendence.* The final Antigone in the trilogy appears in *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* (2011), and this short, deceptively simple literary offering provides a new perspective on Lê's Antigonal incarnations. Here the female protagonist is a woman

writer, who herself assumes the first-person of the narrative, in the first fully female full-length *je* narrative since *Lettre morte*. Antigone therefore finally speaks for herself, in a text not rent with crisis but transcending crisis. The narrator confronts and explains her reasons for another rejection of motherhood, a refusal which here, crucially, is *not* enacted through the death or suicide of the woman writer. This Antigone is perhaps most explicitly, emphatically anti-maternal, vowing *never* to be a mother. She erases, at the same moment as she traces, the figure of the never-to-be-born son, conceived in writing but never to be conceived in reality. This returns us to the motif of the internalised male. At this point, rather than the external masculinity of the father, or of a brother/lover, or even a son implanted by an external male, it is the retention of an always-already-internal masculinity that operates through this evocation of a literary son, with whom the author will remain forever pregnant.

Furthermore, this refusal and resultant spectral pregnancy are explicitly linked to writing and authorship. The text is an exploration and celebration of how this non-mothering choice, and this unborn son, have enabled and enriched the writing life of the woman author. Lê accepts that although the text should be read as fiction, the narrator is nonetheless in some way a double of herself and that *À l'enfant* may be her most intimate, personal and autobiographical text (Schwerdtner 2013). She was invited by the editor Claire Debru at NiL, to write 'la lettre que vous n'avez jamais écrite' (ALQ preface) as part of a series of such letters by French writers, and Lê says she wrote it very fast, 'ça jaillit' (Personal interview 2013). Given this description, and in light of the material dominating the two previous texts, we can confidently speculate that this text is a development and resolution of questions and issues long weighing on Lê's mind. This is confirmed by the following statement:

> J'ai écrit cette lettre en étant en proie à une grande tension d'esprit, comme si l'enjeu était grand, comme si j'étais face à des interrogations qui me hantaient depuis longtemps [...] Ce que je portais en moi, c'était le désir de parler un jour du refus de la maternité et de m'interroger sur le pourquoi de ce refus. Quand la proposition m'a été faite [...] j'ai aussitôt pensé que je ferai parler une femme s'adressant à son fils non-né. (Schwerdtner 2013, 310-1)

À l'enfant is a poignant epistolary homage to the son who will never be born, addressed directly as 'tu' and given life by and within the text. There is a strong sense of sincerity to this

confrontation by the narrator of her own childhood and her non-mothering choice. She repeatedly (and with much resultant conflict) rejects the efforts of her long-term boyfriend (denoted by the letter S) to make her a mother. He sees maternity, in terms almost identical to *In memoriam*'s Thomas, as the 'condition première de la complétude d'une femme', vocalising the idea that a female cannot be fully a woman if she is not a mother (ALQ 8). The narrator insists that maternity is not the highest vocation of a woman, and we read, 'je me jurais de ne jamais être mère' (18), as she declares her 'résolution de rester stérile', remarking, 'je serai toujours la fille, libre d'entraves, et non la mère aux multiples obligations' (ALQ 10). Page after page of a text only sixty-five pages in its entirety is dedicated to the antithesis between on the one hand S's idealised and romantic mythification of motherhood and the son who would perfect the narrator as a woman, and on the other the narrator's often humorously overly-pessimistic fears. In a highly enumerative, almost breathless style, she evokes the chores and duties – breastfeeding, buying baby clothes, nursing a sick child, sleepless nights, enjoying first words and first successes – that she could not and would not do. She will not do these things because of a fundamental incapacity to be governed by rituals other than writing, and a certainty that she would neglect the son's needs in favour of her drive to write (ALQ 42). S points out that other women manage to combine creativity and motherhood, but the narrator counters that her great dread is that her 'veine romanesque' would dry up if she devoted herself to children (ibid.). We understand, therefore, that it is not just that she fears being a bad mother because of her writing, it is perhaps rather more that she fears that children and motherhood would threaten her writing.[25] The text becomes almost a treatise for the non-mothering literary woman.

This third Antigone is also touched by madness and suicide, though the suicide reverts to being *attempted* and not carried out. Following her separation from S, one largely due to her anti-maternal stance, the narrator tries to kill herself by slashing her wrists, and thus there is a partial reiteration of the plot of *In memoriam*. Like Sola, *À l'enfant*'s narrator destroys her manuscripts, although unlike Sola she does not take the step to self-destruction. Sobbing, she alludes to the unborn son, 'toi, que j'avais immolé à mon art' (ALQ 53), and we see the displacement of the sacrifice from (non-)mother to un-mothered son. We wonder to what

[25] The narrator also re-examines her own negative experience of childhood and her poor image of her mother, which further underpins her choice, and Lê stated in our 2013 meeting that her own choice not to have children was partly due to her poor relationship with her mother.

extent she is also sobbing out of grief for the son, a nostalgia for a future that will never be a delivered present. Watching children playing in a playground she describes feeling something, 'Ce n'était pas du remords, mais une indéfinissable impression de mutilation, comme si l'on m'avait amputée d'un membre' (54). We are back to La Manchote and the gallery of mutilated, amputated characters populating Lê's corpus. This mutilation is repaired through writing, through writing the son into a spectral being and, in the process, again re-writing the self into being.

In the Schwerdtner interview, Lê describes feeling unburdened with the publication of *À l'enfant*, and how this allowed her, she felt, to be freed of a part of her that had not been able to confront the issue of child-bearing, and she says, 'je fais le deuil d'une partie de moi-même pour mieux ressusciter' (Schwerdtner 2013, 310). Something has been sacrificed to bring about a renaissance, and this mechanism has operated in and through writing. *In memoriam* and *Cronos* might be seen as the author writing her protagonist into a cave-like dead end, and in *À l'enfant* we could say that Lê has written her Antigone out of the cave. This may be seen as bringing an end to her corpus' *errance,* poetic and productive though that may have been for Lê as a writer. The renaissance achieved with this short text adds further weight to my argument in Chapter Four that Lê's writing is less autobiography than *autogenography*, as I have defined it. The conception of writing as self-generative, a means of self-creation and re-creation with each new text, remains central to Lê's conception of writing, and allows her to overcome and transcend the defeats – of writing, of life – inscribed in previous texts. She described her first book as 'une tentative d'être' (Loucif 2007, 881) and she sees each new book as 'une étape de mon évolution intérieure, et chaque fois, c'est une victoire, aussi bien sur le livre précédent, que sur ce que je vivais jusque là' (Bacholle-Bošković 2006, 14).

For the narrator of *À l'enfant* the result of the sacrifice and refusal to conform to a conventional image of, and role for, women, is, once more, madness, but now madness is temporary and is overcome through medical treatment and hospital care. The narrator experiences hallucinations similar to those of the narrator of *Voix*, and feels accused and judged by a spectre that is not now the father, but the son who condemns her for 'accouplements inféconds, non-respect des conventions' (ALQ 57), in terms echoing both *In memoriam* and *Cronos*.[26] She ends up, like Santos, in the famous mental hospital, Sainte-

[26] The unconventionality and anti-normativity, the *queerness* we might say, of Lê's choice is underlined by a strand of so-called queer maternity emerging recently in France, led by Élisabeth Badinter and Corinne Maier,

Anne.[27] Anxiety accompanies the crisis, both again linked to authorship. In an apparent contradiction of her earlier concerns, the narrator now fears that *without* the son her writing will be arid, repetitive, un-original and may even dry up completely – she fears for her writing if she is bereft of the male within. As the letter closes, it is the son within that facilitates a sense of acceptance, of a crisis overcome and of resolution far more convincing than in any of Lê's previous texts discussed here. The narrator addresses the son saying, '*dans les plis de mon être, tu fais partie de moi*. Même immatériel, tu imprimes une inflexion qui favorise un renouvellement de mes thèmes' (ALQ 63; my emphasis). The narrator confronts and surmounts her complex feelings about her non-mothering choice – enabling the author Linda Lê to do the same. The tone and content of Lê's interview with Karin Schwerdtner as cited above, and of my own meeting with her, further reinforce this sense of resolution and self-reconciliation at this point in her corpus and writing career.

Yet, this process relies on this son remaining 'dans les plis de [s]on être' and we are left with something of a paradox. The son is conceived in writing, a writing that at the same moment describes how this conception will never be made flesh, but that nonetheless produces a 'son' for Lê, and *in* Lê. In the un-writing of the biological son she writes her own textual son, which is a far more real existence for Lê, who exists more fully through her writing than in flesh and blood existence. This final male incorporation is therefore necessary for the woman writer to overcome her anxiety of authorship. It is the retention of an always-already-present masculinity internal to the author, with whom she will remain forever pregnant, just like the Vietnamese peasant and the *femme au chapeau d'homme* of *Voix*. If we read the male figure as a metaphor for the 'Law', authority or the Symbolic, we realise the woman author may be seen to have transcended the need to internalise an external 'authority' and predicates her own authorship on her own pre-existing authority. *À l'enfant*'s narrator tells the 'son', 'Tu m'as aidée à me transcender, j'ai des audaces qu'avant de me rendre compte de mes déficiences, je ne me permettrais pas. Je te dois de m'être surmontée' (ALQ 63-4). Returning to the motif of the hand, so metonymically symbolic for Lê, as we have seen in the previous chapter, we note that on the back cover of *À l'enfant* are featured three *chiaroscuro*

---

who confront a perceived national fetishisation of maternity in contemporary French culture in their texts, *Le Conflit, la femme et la mère* (2010) and *No Kid: Quarante raisons de ne pas avoir d'enfant* (2007) respectively. Badinter attacks the centrality of motherhood in French culture, and Maier responds to France's recent record birth-rates. See Nina Power (2012) for an interesting discussion of how this brand of queer anti-reproductive futurism intersects with Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004).

[27] The *Pavillon Benjamin Ball* of *Conte* is a wing of this hospital.

photographs of a woman's hands (which appear to be Linda Lê's own hands) in silhouette, and in the centre image these hands are folded on themselves. No longer needing her hand held by the father, Lê is holding her own hand.[28] Steiner points out in relation to the idealistic romanticism of the Antigone myth that, 'The co-ordinates of Idealism are exile and attempted homecoming' (1984, 14), and we might be tempted to read these as co-ordinates of Lê's exilic writing, which finds some sense of homecoming through her re-writing of the Antigone myth.

There are two problematic left-overs to this resolution. Firstly, why must the figure from which the female author derives authority (regardless of how self-generated this figure is) be *male*? In other words, why can authority not derive from the *female* without the need for some male element – do Lê's texts suggest that there can (still, or yet) not be a 'woman's law'? Secondly, there is the fact that there is still *some* sacrifice necessary on the part of the writing woman. In necessarily sacrificing motherhood in this way, Lê may bring us full-circle to a regressive Beauvoirean model of the intellectual woman, who must sacrifice aspects of her female self in order to become a masculinised (or hermaphrodite) literary 'mother'.[29] It might be countered that writing is an *alternative* means of creative life, one that can be just as self-fulfilling as motherhood. As Averis points out in relation to *In memoriam*, 'Seen as a creative act, maternity is repudiated by Sola, and literature is posited in the novel as a creative alternative to maternity which fulfils a similar drive for self-realisation' (2011, 217). It may be problematic to see the narrator of Lê's anti-maternal stand as a universal role model for the woman author, and to quote Kristeva

> *it seems obvious [...] that the refusal of maternity cannot be a mass policy* and that the majority of women today see the possibility for fulfilment, if not entirely at least to a large degree, in bringing a child into the world [yet] what modern women have to say about [motherhood] should nonetheless be listened to attentively. (1986, 206; my emphasis)

While it should be possible for women to seek fulfilment in *both* creative and biological production, motherhood is not a necessity for every woman, and its refusal is important to understand and integrate into our conception of womanhood.

[28] I am indebted to Michèle Bacholle-Bošković for pointing out this image, and for several other observations relating to *À l'enfant* that have informed this chapter.
[29] Beauvoir had a strong formative influence on Lê, who read Beauvoir's work avidly as a young woman (Personal interview 2013).

To tease out a little this relation of writing and non-mothering, and the very specific masculine gender of the child, it helps to put Lê's text into dialogue with the ideas of an important literary mother, Adrienne Rich. A creative mother in both the literary and biological senses, a poet and mother of three sons, Rich offered in *Of Woman Born* (1976) an exploration of the complexities and contradictions of motherhood for intellectual women that still has great relevance. She outlines there a more holistic meaning of motherhood, which she opposes to the socially-constructed *institution* of motherhood, and which she describes as 'the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children' (1976, 13). Reading this in the context of *À l'enfant*, we might argue that Lê *has* become a mother – she has acknowledged, confronted and accepted (and accepted the loss of) her 'potential relationship to her powers of reproduction' and has 'mothered' her textual son. Rich reminds us that, under patriarchy, 'female possibility has been literally massacred on the site of motherhood' (ibid.). She writes, 'the makers and sayers of culture, the namers, have been the sons of the mothers' and adds, 'women have not been makers and sayers of patriarchal culture' (1976, 11). Linda Lê, by producing, pre-emptively aborting yet retaining the 'son' in writing, in the folds of her being, both refuses to produce a maker and sayer of culture external to herself and retains this power to make and say culture for herself. She has retained a totem, a symbol, of her reproductive potential, and she re-internalises this 'future Law of the Father' to birth her own cultural and literary authority. The 'massacre of female possibility' of the Antigonal sacrifice is avoided through literary displacement and we recognise the possibility of imagining a 'woman's law'.

This is reinforced by a generous gesture of solidarity Lê inscribes in the final lines of *À l'enfant*, where she explicitly offers this account of her pain, her experience and her choices to help other women, 'Je m'adresse aussi à toutes celles qui se sont dispensées de se conformer aux lois de la nature [...] ces lignes sont une offrande' (65). Rich states her belief 'that only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will be truly ours' (1976, 16). Lê's offering is a rare, intimate and courageous document testifying to the challenges and contradictions facing the literary woman non-mother, even one who is sure of her choice, and this contributes to the collective description of a world which may be truly 'ours' in the sense of both men's and women's. European culture is enriched by Lê's courage in writing about her choices as a woman, and a writing woman, and in this she gives Antigone a voice. With this gesture Lê

arguably ends her own i-Sola-tion to a certain extent, and effectuates the homecoming I mentioned above. The author conceded more recently that in relation to her sense of being *apatride*, 'Il y a un certain apaisement au fils des années. Je me sens toujours étrangère, d'ailleurs. C'est assez salutaire de se sentir étrangère. Je suis rentrée plusieurs fois au Vietnam, mais je sentais plus étrangère là qu'en France, et c'est là peut être que je me suis dit que je suis française, d'une certaine manière' (Personal interview 2013).

In assessing Lê's Antigonal legacy, it is worth remembering one final ghost, that of Antigone's sister Ismene. The personification of female conformism, Ismene is the antithesis of the mad bad rebel Antigone, and her figure vanishes without comment from Sophocles' text as from western culture, while Antigone's spectre remains a powerful motif to this day, pointing to the kind of *au-delà* beyond phallogocentric patriarchy that Lê's writing – and indeed also Beauvoir's and Santos's – bring us closer to realising. It is an *au-delà* in which madness may not be a necessary condition for women writers.

-- Conclusion --

I came to this project with the view that the figure of the madwoman was disempowering and disfiguring, and that this trope in literature facilitated marginalisation, making women complicit in their own marginalisation in the Symbolic landscape. In the course of my research, the madwomen of Beauvoir's, Santos's and Lê's corpuses have led me to understand that I had over-identified the literary figure with the experience of real women, of whom Chesler rightly argues, 'Neither genuinely mad women, nor women who are hospitalised for conditioned female behaviour are powerful revolutionaries' (1997, 4). The lived experience of madness – for women and men – is debilitating, without question. However, these experiences of suffering can offer insight and self-knowledge, a form of mad lucidity. Furthermore, I realised that I had underestimated the political force of the metaphoric and sublimatory displacement from lived experience to cultural articulation, and as Cixous concedes of the metaphor, 'ça fonctionne bien, ça a son efficacité' (1975, 271). This mad figure gives women writers a canvas and a vehicle for the expression of frustration, anger and also of resistance, revolt and revolutionary ambitions. As a literary motif the madwoman is fertile, at times producing powerfully intimate, poetic and moving writing. The figure, typically reduced to pathology and silenced by masculine misogynistic discourses and practices, is profoundly expressive when produced by the pen of women writers. Nonetheless, she retains a stigma, a staining leftover of this misogyny that has been internalised by women writers (as by so many women) who have then, consciously or unconsciously, tried to challenge this misogyny within themselves through the re-appropriation of the madwoman herself. To this extent, as we have seen, the trope becomes the site of conflict and challenge, the motor for a renegotiation of identity through the autogenographic process of writing.

I have referred in my Introduction and elsewhere in this thesis to the challenge of the double bind, and how the madwoman is used to conceive of a way out of this double bind. We have seen how for Santos this left her frustrated and stuck in a maze of madness and language from which the metaphor failed to offer her the means to escape. With the development and transcendence hinted at as a future possibility in Beauvoir's *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, and finally witnessed in Linda Lê's Antigone trilogy, we may see the figure of the madwoman signalling a route beyond – beyond confinement, beyond oppression and beyond

the self-confinement of madness. For women to participate in culture, to shape their own destinies and their own world, whether or not they write with what some see as the language of the Other, the important thing is to write, to produce a language of their own. Thereby they may write their way into culture and take the myths and mystifications, including those of the presumption of female madness, in order to recast them and transcend the extent to which they enslave and oppress. Linda Lê deconstructs the binaries that polarise the complex characters of women into reductive, simplistic caricatures, over-writing this with the complex contradictions of an individual woman's personal history. Her narrator in *À l'enfant* may be seen in a way to reunite both Antigone and Ismene, Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre (the two Mrs Rochesters). Refusing to compromise, the narrator asserts herself enough to explain that refusal and justify herself in a discourse that confronts the spectre of women's madness and steps beyond those confines. Her defiance of social norms leads neither to the madness of the attic nor the asylum, neither to the cave nor the grave.

During my research I have been confronted with the question, do we need these madwomen, and even, do we want these madwomen? This question may in fact be redundant, whether we want or need them, we *have* these madwomen – both in the literary and the lived spheres. We all have someone, or perhaps several someones, in our lives or our pasts who have suffered from some form of madness: depression; schizophrenia; hallucinations; eating disorders or otherwise. Madness is as much a part of the human condition as love, hate, death, fear and desire. Madness is indeed a symptom of the human condition, and women's madness is a symptom of the condition of the woman as human and woman. There is a specificity to that experience that is most fully articulated by women themselves. For this reason, women writing about women's madness, in fiction as well as in factual genres, will continue to remain an important feature of the literary landscape.

A repeated motif in each of the narratives discussed in this thesis is the *vide*, and a universal aspect of these discourses of madness is the extent to which they reveal that we are all standing on the edge of the *vide*, the abyss of the Real, of death, of madness. Some of us have our backs turned to this void, to screen ourselves from the view of something we cannot or will not see. Some, on the contrary, are leaning over the void, perpetually at risk of falling in. Others are brave enough to face the void, standing just far enough from the edge to see it clearly and describe it for those who do not have the same courage or (in)sight. Writers are in this position of mediator and translator, describing the void and in the process attempting to

negotiate the relationship of humanity to what lies there: birth, death and what lies beyond the Symbolic, in short, the Real. In a way also, the three women authors studied here variously represent each of the above positions. Beauvoir, all too aware of the presence of the abyss and constantly menaced by it, compulsively shields herself from it and yet cannot resist also constantly turning towards it. Santos is at risk of engulfment, leaning too far, she attempts to recover her footing, but in the end the pull is too great. Linda Lê perhaps most successfully retains her resolute gaze on madness and death, and sublimates the drive to lean too far, yet unflinchingly describes what she sees.

The figure of the madwoman persists in contemporary women's writing, and although my study has adopted a diachronic approach, there is scope for further valuable research on a synchronic level, into women's madness in contemporary women's writing in French, or indeed on an inter-disciplinary basis. There are, in the contemporary corpus, some interesting contrasts in the modern manifestations of the madwoman. This can be seen, for example in the divergence between Gisèle Pineau's *Folie, aller simple* (2010) and Nelly Arcan's *Folle* (2004). Pineau's text, narrated from the point of view of a psychiatric nurse, appears to signal, as with Lê's *À l'enfant*, the possibility for the female writing subject to transcend madness. The central female protagonist-narrator confronts her own and her family's potential for madness, which she realises exists within each of us, and also assumes control of her life emotionally and financially. The tone is pragmatically realist rather than utopian, however the topos of female suicide, nonetheless, appears again stubbornly intrinsic to this text. Suicide is also a leitmotif in the more sombre text by Arcan, which narrates the determination of the broken-hearted woman after her split with her lover to write her story and then take her life. A synchronic study attempting to take account of the divergences between these and other similar texts emerging at a recent historic moment would be a worthwhile undertaking.

The texts examined in this thesis, and the contemporary examples above, suggest that just as women's oppression and resulting anxieties produced madness and the figure of the madwoman in the past, persisting forces of sexist oppression that continue to produce anxieties, may continue to result in madness and the figure of the madwoman in women's literature going forward. We exist in a paradoxical context, in which women write, speak and act in huge numbers, yet in which also the daily suppression of women's voices continues to challenge that expression. This is clear for example from the 'Everyday Sexism' project of Laura Bates, which takes us full circle to Beauvoir's 'Le Sexisme ordinaire' column in *Les Temps*

modernes, and reveals the disappointing need for such a project so many decades later. Bates describes the enormous global response to her blog's invitation to women to record incidents of daily sexual harassment, ranging from minor lewd comments to violent rape, and how this results in many women feeling unsafe (yet again...still) to move freely in the social space. She also describes how this sexist containment is mirrored in the sexualised, misogynistic representation of women in the mediatic social space with the result that:

> it is impossible to underestimate the impact of the fact that still, in 2013, women's stories are not being told. That women, in those stories we hear, are still portrayed as so incredibly limited, pigeonholed and stereotyped. And that so very few of those stories are told in a woman's voice. (Bates 2014, 186)

This produces 'an incredibly distorted picture' of women (ibid.) and we realise that, more than ever perhaps, there is an urgent need for women's voices to tell their own stories – whether of joy, love, hate, pain or madness.

One aspect of the discussion around women, language, oppression, expression and madness that this thesis has touched on in most chapters and on which I would like to refocus here, is the crucial role played by publishing in the story of women's writing. My chapters on Beauvoir and Santos in particular reveal the part played by publication, whether successful or failed, in the authors' anxieties and frustrations. We might speculate here that Linda Lê's apparently successful effort to transcend crisis, madness and anxiety may have been facilitated by her continuing ability to publish (with a sympathetic publisher in Christian Bourgeois), to find an outlet, an audience and serious literary recognition for her writing. Her texts are not *lettres mortes*. Without digressing into Hegelian discussions of battles for recognition, it is worth insisting a little on this point. Madness is both symptomatic of isolation and a consequence of isolation, and each of the three writers in this study is a solitary figure in some way. Women – or men – may withdraw from society, from language and from themselves, or into death. Writing is a way out of that isolation, but there is another element to the equation, just as communication is dependent on the exchange of the enunciation between two subjects. The corpus here, and Santos' in particular, attests to the importance of women's writing being received, published and read with respect and recognition. This emphasises the extent to which, while there is a responsibility on women to assume agency in

order to be included within the cultural frame of reference, there is a reciprocal responsibility on patriarchy, the Symbolic, society – whatever we wish to call it – to respect, acknowledge and (adapt to) accommodate that agency. It is not simply a question of asserting the right to speak or write, but as Moi puts it, 'to gain access to the right to speak with authority without being imprisoned in gender, but also still as a woman'.[1]

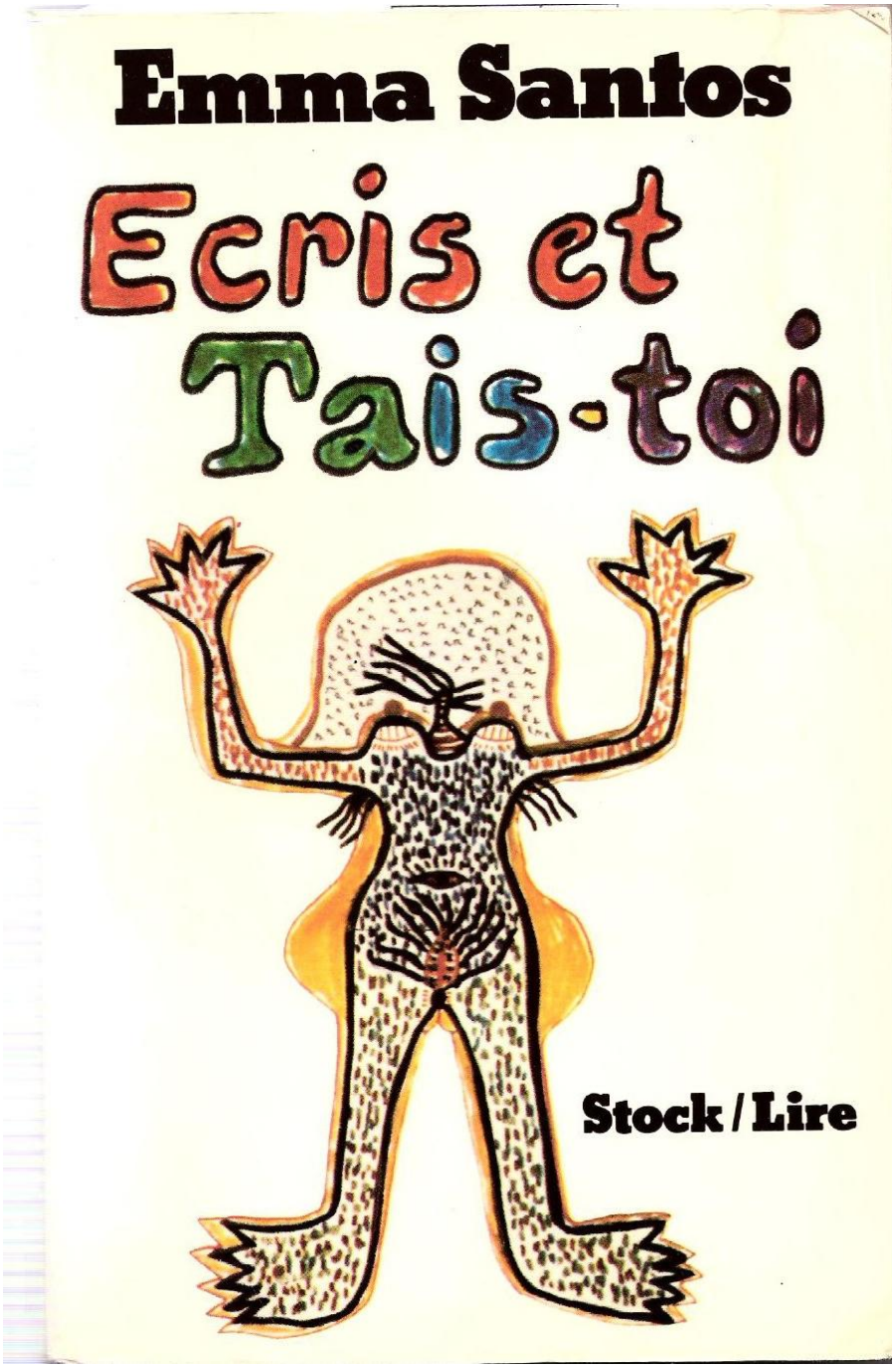
It seems appropriate to return to Kristevan notions of revolution and revolt in relation to madness and crisis. In order for mad crisis, or poetic language, to effect revolution, to be liberating and transformative, the subject (and society, and language) must come out the other side, or transcend the madness, the moment of revolution. Following breakdown, and perhaps the breakdown of a revolution conceived and conducted through semiotic madness, Henke asserts that 'the newly revised subject, emerging as the semifictive protagonist of an enabling counternarrative, is free to rebel against the values and practices of a dominant culture and to assume an empowered position of political agency in the world' (1998, xv-xvi). Kristeva recognised this. Already in 1974 *La Révolution du langage poétique* signals the limits of the semiotic, which necessarily co-exists within some sort of relationship with the Symbolic. Arguably, the moment of revolution, particularly for feminism, occurred in the 1970s and has been transcended, producing major consequences for Symbolic structures and systems of thought with equally significant repercussions for the individual. That is certainly how Kristeva sees things: ''68 was a worldwide movement that contributed to an unprecedented reordering of private life' (2002, 18). The lexical field of Kristeva's writing following the 1970s moves from that of revolution to revolt. What she continues to insist on, including in *Revolt, She Said*, is the imperative to retain a persistent attitude of revolt that constantly questions Symbolic authority, 'revolt is indispensable, both to psychic life, and to the bonds that make society hang together, as long as it remains a live force and resists accommodations' (2002, 38). We might consider contemporary women's writing as the discourse of this indispensable revolt, attempting to inject a live force into the bonds that hold society together in order to ensure those bonds remain supportive and not restraining.

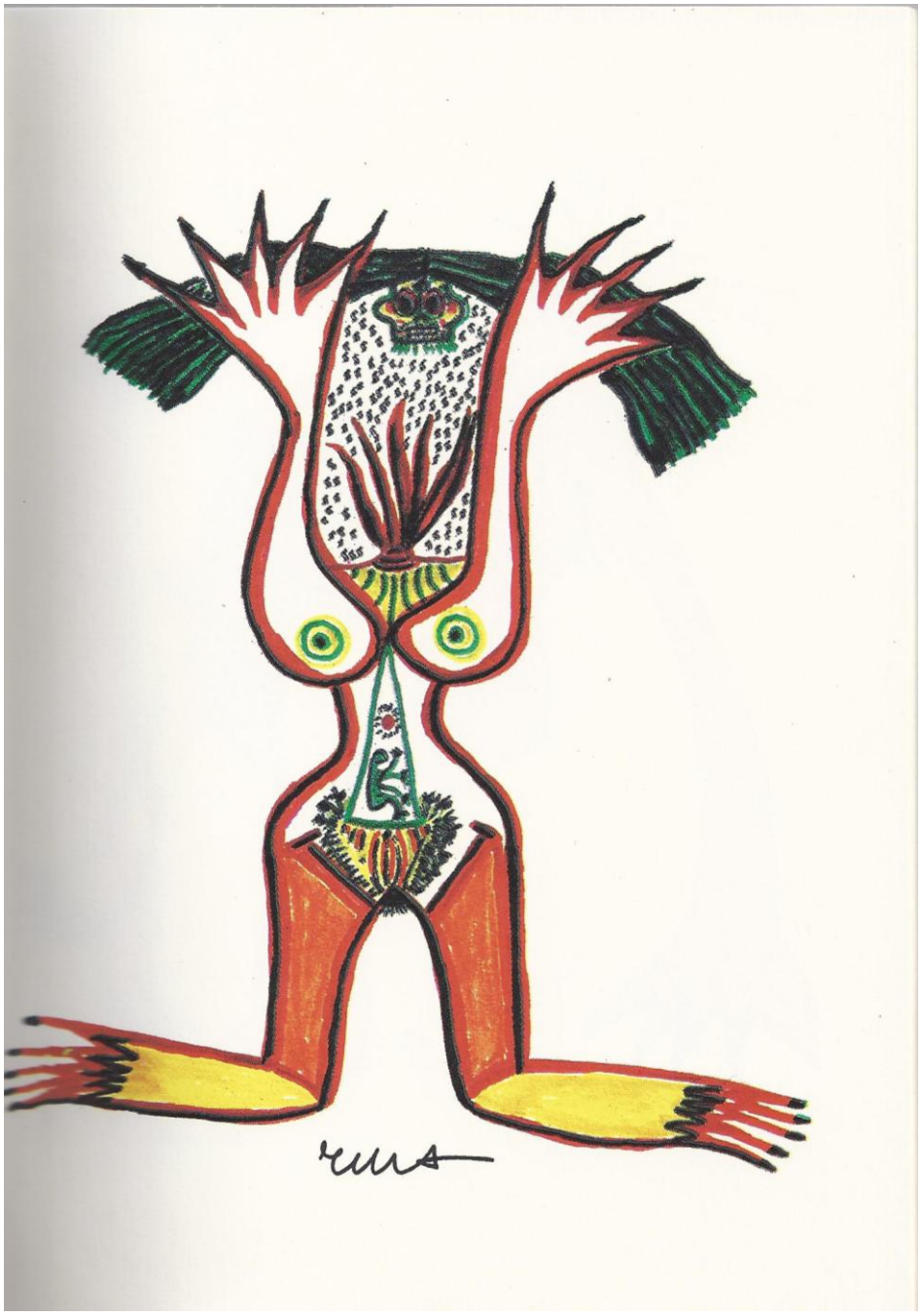
To return to my point of departure, and shift discourse from the intellectual to the personal, this research has helped me to understand my own relationship to women's writing, my own potential for madness, and my mother's madness. My mother's problem, I realise,

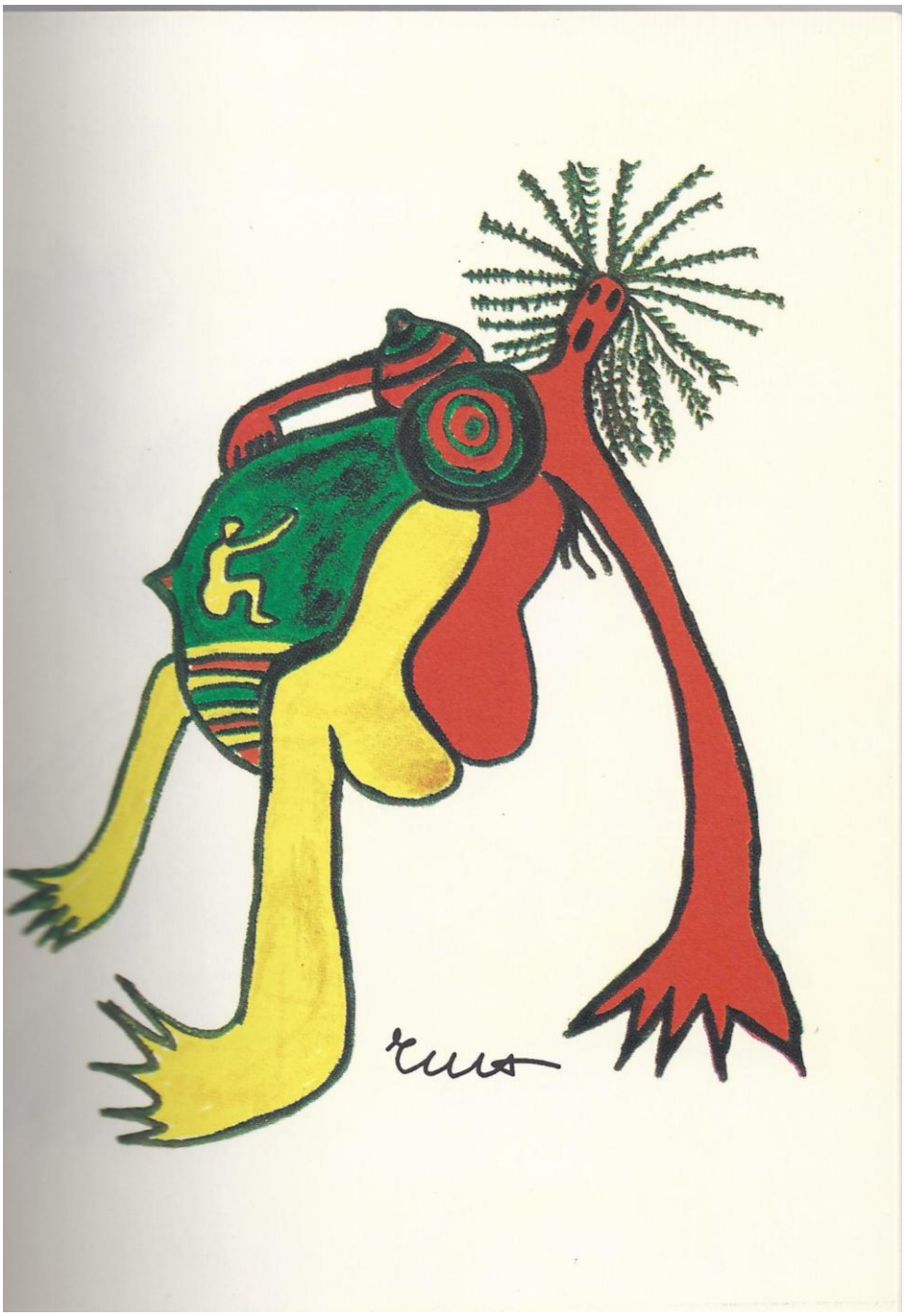
[1] This quotation is from The Master-Mind Lecture given at the British Academy, London, 20th March 2014.

was not her illness – for we may all become ill without becoming victim to that illness – her downfall was partly that when she tried to speak she was not listened to or acknowledged with adequate respect; it was also that she had difficulties and differences that she did not speak about with confidence or with the authority to become the agent of her illness, her language and her life.

APPENDIX I: SANTOS SKETCHES AND DRAWINGS







APPENDIX II: INTERVIEWS WITH LINDA LÊ

1. Informal interview with Lê. Paris, October 2013:

Elle se définit comme 'lectrice':
LL: Je peux imaginer ne pas écrire, mais pas de ne pas lire, c'est impossible... [elle lit chaque jour]
Je me sens plus en vie en écrivant et en tant qu'enfant, je me sentais plus en vie en lisant.

GNC: Vous-vous voyez toujours pas comme féministe?
LL: Je ne suis pas féministe; en tant qu'être humain:
Q. Si vous n'êtes pas "féministe" comment expliquez-vous tant de personnages féminins, qui confrontent des problèmes qui touchent les femmes en particulier?
R. Ce sont plutôt des femmes broyées... C'est vrai que j'ai une attitude féministe.

GNC: Dans plusieurs entretiens vous parlez des influences littéraires, dont la plupart sont des écrivains et vous nommez très peu de femmes, à part Ingeborg Bachmann et Marina Tsvetaïeva. Est-ce qu'il y a des écrivaines auxquelles vous vous identifiez?
LL: "Quand on écrit il vaut mieux ne pas s'identifier à personne"
Néanmoins, elle répète être beaucoup influencée par Ingeborg Bachmann. En parlant des écrivaines, elle confirme avoir aimé Marie Darrieussecq, mais d'avoir lu un roman d'Amélie Nothomb, qu'elle n'avait pas aimé:
LL: J'avais l'impression qu'elle fait partie d'un autre monde que moi."
Elle avoue son admiration pour l'écriture de Sylvia Plath, dont elle lit sa poésie, et son journal intime.
Par rapport à Simone de Beauvoir:
LL: Elle a beaucoup compté pour moi**.** J'ai lu *La femme rompue*, *Une mort très douce*, et *Le deuxième sexe* a beaucoup compté pour moi, comme adolescente.
Elle avoue aussi admirer Cécile Wajsbrot.

GNC: Comment décririez-vous les femmes qui se trouvent régulièrement au centre de votre écriture, soit en tant que narratrice, soit comme protagoniste?
LL: "Ce sont des femmes qui ont du mal à faire entendre leur voix, des personnages qui sont toujours en lutte, en déphasage avec leur époque."
GNC: Vous vous voyez comme ça?
LL: Oui, j'ai toujours eu le sentiment de nager à contre-courant

J'abords le sujet de son récent succès, incluant la séléction pour le Prix Goncourt, 2012.
GNC: La nomination Goncourt, quel effet a-t-il sur vous? Cela vous rend plus vulnérable, ou au contraire vous donne plus de confiance en vous?
LL: Ça n'a pas changé grand chose. Ça faisait plaisir, ça faisait plaisir à la maison d'édition, c'était un moment de plaisir...mais le succès, ça se passe en dehors de moi.

GNC: Écrire c'est un travail de peine, c'est difficile?

LL: Ça devient de moins en moins difficile, il existe même une certaine joie....je suis dans une intense anxiété quand j'écris. Écrire, c'est le seul moyen de communiquer avec le monde, pour moi.

GNC: Vous avez toujours écrit, déjà pendant votre enfance?
LL: Non, en fait, en tant qu'adolescent et enfant je m'interdisais d'écrire. Je ne pouvais pas...à part d'un journal intime...jusqu'à ce que je me sentais 'prête' à me jeter à l'eau, d'en avoir l'audace.

GNC: Vous écrivez toujours à la main?
LL: "Non. Depuis deux ou trois ans je suis passée à l'ordinateur. Je suis passée radicalement de l'antiquité à la modernité."
GNC: Qu'est-ce qu'a déclenché ce changement?
LL: Écrire des articles pour un journal littéraire. J'ai commencé par les taper, et ensuite...
GNC: Et cela change l'écriture, vous croyez?
LL: C'est peut-être une illusion que je me fais, mais j'ai le sentiment que c'est plus froid peut être...
Il y a un autre changement...j'écris la nuit maintenant. Je sors tôt les matins me promener dans Paris, et je travaille la nuit – autrefois c'était le matin que j'écrivais.

GNC: Comment abordez-vous l'écriture, vous faites des plans, des structures des livres avant de commencer?
LL: Je fais un plan, mais ça reste dans ma tête. Ça pourrait changer...Je ne relis pas mes livres.

GNC: Quelle évolution voyez-vous dans votre écriture?
LL: C'est plus romanesque, moins liée à l'autobiographie, il y a une plus grande richesse, dans les nuances. Ça fait plaisir...

GNC: Pourquoi y a-t-il tant d'images de la destruction des textes dans vos livres?
LL: Parce que j'avais détruit des textes à moi. Ça a resté comme un traumatisme...
GNC: Et pourquoi avez-vous détruit vos propres textes?
LL: Dans un moment de rage contre moi-même. Je semble très paisible là, mais j'ai des moments de colères forts contre moi-même...pas contre les autres.
GNC: Vous avez parlé assez souvent de votre sentiment de sentir 'étrangère' en France et d'être 'hérétique' et métèque vis-à-vis la langue française. Est-ce que ça a changé, comment vous vous sentez maintenant?
LL: Il y a un certain apaisement au fils des années. Je me sens toujours étrangère, d'ailleurs. C'est assez salutaire de se sentir étrangère. Je suis rentrée plusieurs fois au Vietnam, mais je sentais plus étrangère là qu'en France, et c'est là peut être que je me suis dit que je suis française, d'une certaine manière.

Elle raconte comment elle est venue à Paris à 18 ans, et comment sa mère n'était pas contente qu'elle ne vienne toute seule. Elle dit se sentir bien à l'aise à Paris, elle se réjouit de l'anonymat.

GNC: Quelle est l'attitude de votre mère envers vos romans?
LL: "Elle ne lit pas mes livres."
GNC: Ca vous faites de la peine?
LL: Non. Je ne m'entends pas bien avec elle, alors, ça ne me fait pas grand chose.

GNC: Mais vous avez une bonne relation avec vos soeurs?
LL: "Elles me soutiennent. Ce sont des amies plutôt que des soeurs."
GNC: Votre manière de voir et de penser 'la mère' a-t-elle changé depuis que votre soeur est devenue mère?
LL: Oui, je savais qu'elle serait une très bonne mère, une mère idéale.

Linda Lê est tante, elle a deux nièces qu'elle voit très souvent. Elle voit sa soeur aînée deux ou trois fois par mois. Les deux autres soeurs ont fait le même choix qu'elle, de ne pas avoir d'enfants.

GNC: Est-ce que ça aussi a été lié, comme pour vous, à l'expérience de l'enfance que vous avez eu avec votre mère?
LL: Oui, sûrement.

Elle me laisse poser des questions sur sa vie conjugale, et confirme vivre avec un compagnon depuis 10 années.

Au fur et à mesure, elle commence à en parler de sa propre personnalité:
LL: Je suis tellement timide, j'étais toujours peu confiante en moi...alors je me sens moins timide...avant je venais à la boulangerie, et je faisais trois tentatives d'y entrer avant de réussir...mais en écrivant, là je pouvais tout.

On commence à en parler de ses romans:
Conte de l'amour bifrons:
Elle confirme le thème d'orphelins là-dedans
GNC: Ca représente une évolution, un développement?
LL: Ce sont aussi les évènements de la vie qui influencent les livres. J'avais fait le travail du deuil pour le père, je me sentais moins hantée par le père, et je suis tournée vers le thème de chercher le double. Les romantiques [allemands] disent que chercher le double c'est chercher la mort. Ce sera arriver à un terme...c'est vrai que c'est une vision très romantique...
GNC: A la fin du roman Ivan s'en va, et après Ylane s'en va aussi, c'est pour le suivre?
LL: Non, elle prend son propre chemin, c'est très positif, elle est indépendante, elle a quitté l'asile, elle assume sa vie.

À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas:
LL: "Ca jaillit, je l'ai écrit très vite. C'est très particulier, ce n'est pas un roman, ni une nouvelle..."
GNC: Vous vous sentez définie par la décision(de ne pas avoir d'enfant)?
LL: Oui, d'une certaine manière, mais tout ça c'est loin derrière moi maintenant (la maternité).

GNC: Vous avez écrit sur la folie dans *Voix* et après des années, vous en revenez la-dessus dans *Conte de l'amour bifrons* et *In Memoriam* – pourquoi?

LL: A cause des nouveaux effondrements. J'ai eu de nouveaux des périodes de difficulté.
GNC: Vous dîtes que l'écriture ne guérit pas, mais ça aide, d'écrire la-dessus?
LL: Oui. C'est vrai que j'ai vécu dans un romantisme de la folie et la mort. J'ai ensuite compris que la folie est une très grande stérilité. Il y en a l'impuissance à rentrer en communication avec l'autre, l'impuissance à créer. Nerval, par exemple, avait écrit pas dans les moments de folie, mais dans les moments de lucidité. On ne peut pas écrire pendant une période de folie, mais qu'après.
Ce n'est pas à dire que la folie est incohérente – dans les moments de folie il y a une très grande cohérence...toute est cohérent, dans une sorte de démence systématique. On a une idée très précise de ce qui se passe autour de lui.

GNC: Et comment voyez-vous l'asile, qui surgit comme *locus* souvent dans vos romans?
LL: L'asile est ambivalent – c'est vrai qu'on y est totalement protégé du monde, c'est un refuge, bien qu'il ait aussi l'autorité de ceux qui surveillent.
GNC: Et des medicaments?
LL: Ils m'ont plutôt aidée. Mais, je suis partagée, parce que mon cas a été salutaire, mais je sais qu'Artaud, par exemple, était empoisonné par des médicaments pendant 9 ans."

GNC: Comment voyez-vous la figure d'Antigone, qui réapparaît surtout dans plusieurs de vos romans les plus récents, en *In Memoriam* et *Cronos*, par exemple?
LL: C'est une figure forcément positive. Il y a des Antigones partout, on en a besoin des Antigones.

Elle est d'accord avec l'idée que cette figure, et le processus d'écrire sur elle, est en quelque sorte une sublimation – le fait d'écrire, de créer et d'imaginer des femmes qui se suicident la libère du besoin de faire pareil, et l'aide à vivre.

GNC: C'est quoi sa rébellion [d'Antigone], en quoi est-elle si puissant, positif?
LL: C'est le refus des lois écrits et le respect des lois non-écrit, c'est la grande figure de la révolte.
GNC: Mais comment est-ce si puissant, et réussi, si elle est morte?
LL: Oui, c'est vrai qu'elle se laisse condamner, mais c'est un défi plus qu'une résignation.

GNC: L'écriture peut changer la société?
LL: J'ai toujours espéré, mais là j'en doute...

2. Interview with Linda Lê conducted via email. December, 2012:

Position culturelle France/Vietnam:
GNC: Comment voyez-vous votre relation avec la France maintenant? Il y a un sens depuis l'entretien avec Sabine Loucif que vous êtes plus contente de votre place/position dans la culture française. Que direz-vous maintenant sur cette description que vous avez donnée d'être 'une citoyenne de la langue française'?
LL: Le sentiment d'être en porte-à-faux ne me quitte jamais. Comme je l'ai souvent dit et écrit, j'ai un fort sentiment de non-appartenance, à quelque communauté que ce soit. « Citoyenne de la langue française »? Je dirais plutôt maintenant que seule la littérature a représenté pour moi un point d'ancrage, une sorte de port d'attache.

GNC: Par conséquence, comment voyez-vous votre relation avec le Vietnam, il existe une évolution, une plus grande distance, a votre avis?
LL: Après trois retours au Vietnam, je vois ce pays comme un pays que j'ai redécouvert. J'ai été frappée, lors de mon dernier voyage là-bas, en 2010, des changements qui s'y sont produits. Saigon, surtout, ne ressemble plus du tout à la ville que j'ai connue. En dehors des moments où j'ai retrouvé quelques bribes de vietnamien, j'ai eu l'impression d'être dans un pays que je ne connais pas du tout, mais qui suscite ma curiosité, comme si j'étais une étrangère qui attend d'être étonnée.

GNC: Je sais que vous rejetez le titre 'Francophone' d'habitude...quelles sont vos pensées la-dessus maintenant?
LL: Je me suis exprimée à ce sujet dans *Le Complexe de Caliban*. Et j'ai cité ailleurs des propos de Marina Tsvetaïeva selon qui on n'écrit pas pour être un poète allemand, russe, français, francophone, mais pour être TOUT et abolir les frontières.

GNC: Pourquoi était le déménagement de Da Lat jusqu'à Saigon une telle perte de 'paradis enfantin'?
LL:Dalat représentait le paradis de l'enfance. La guerre a mis fin à la seule période heureuse de la vie familiale.

GNC: Avez-vous lu beaucoup de psychanalyse (voire Lacan)? Qu'en pensez-vous? Quel est votre avis sur tant de lectures psychanalytique de vos textes?
Seriez-vous d'accord avec la suggestion que vos textes possèdent beaucoup d'indices et de thèmes psychanalytiques?
LL: J'ai beaucoup lu Freud aux alentours de ma vingtième année, en étant surtout intéressée par les études de cas. Je n'ai aucune opinion sur les lectures psychanalytiques de mes textes, qui renferment peut-être beaucoup de thèmes qui ont trait à la psychanalyse, mais je crois avoir toujours été plus intéressée par les mythes fondateurs.

L'écriture – folie – féminisme – voix de femme:
GNC: On pourrait lire dans le personnage de La Manchote, avec sa main mutilée, et le traitement de la 'main valide' dans *Voix*, combiné avec la destruction compulsive de texte, une anxiété autour de la position de la femme écrivain, seriez-vous d'accord? Croyez-vous que cela cède place à une position plus confiante plus tard?

LL: La Manchote, comme beaucoup de mes personnages dans mes textes d'alors, souffrent d'une infirmité. Il y avait aussi dans *Les Dits d'un idiot* le personnage du paralytique. Cela exprime un rapport au monde qui est placé sous le signe du manque, du handicap. Je ne m'interrogeais pas sur la place de la femme écrivain, j'étais hantée par des figures qui étaient dans l'incomplétude.

GNC: Aviez-vous des périodes de difficultés ou d'hésitation par rapport à votre écriture? Si c'est le cas, comment les avez-vous surmontées?
LL: Je crois que quiconque écrit et n'est pas un faiseur qui produit à tour de bras traverse toujours de graves périodes de doute. J'ai bien entendu connu des crises où je remettais en question ce que j'écrivais. Mais ces moments de crise m''ont permis de me dépasser, de me transcender, et j'en suis sortie en constatant souvent que, lorsque j'étais terrassée, l'écriture devenait un défi à relever, et je franchissais une nouvelle étape dans ma poursuite de ce qui m'est essentiel, à savoir l'invention de personnages qui me font sortir de moi-même.

GNC: Comment expliqueriez-vous le besoin inévitable/compulsif d'écrire toujours, que vous semblez posséder et dont vous parlez dans l'entretien avec Loucif?
LL: Je parlerais plutôt de rage d'écrire, comme d'autres parlent de la rage d'aimer. J'ai longtemps écrit en ayant la rage au ventre, en étant en révolte ouverte. Je me sens toujours en rupture avec le monde. Écrire donne un sens à ma rébellion.

Folie:
GNC: Comment voyez-vous le lien entre la folie et l'écriture? Elle fait toujours partie du processus chez vous?
Vous dîtes dans 'Loucif' que la folie peut 'sauver' mais non pas 'guérir', veuillez m'en dire plus, m'expliquez ce que vous entendez par là?
LL: Je n'ai aucun romantisme de la folie, je crois que la création n'est possible que lorsqu'on vient à bout de ce qui vous a fait dérailler. Cela dit, je me suis toujours intéressée à l'art brut, à ce que des personnes enfermées dans des asiles d'aliénés parviennent à créer.
Je l'ai déjà souvent dit, écrire n'aide pas à guérir, ce n'est pas une thérapie, car le mal selon moi va en s'aggravant, puisqu'on remue le couteau dans la plaie, puisqu'on revient sans cesse sur ce qui vous blesse, vous désoriente, vous jette hors de vos repères.

GNC: Avez-vous le sens que votre style, votre écriture ont évolué en une voix plus 'masculine'? Il y a une alternance ou partage de voix des narrateurs entre féminine et masculine/plus neutre (*Cronos*), ou bien il existe des couches de voix, par exemple: *In Memoriam* - écrivain-femme (vous)/narrateur-homme qui parle d'une auteur-femme (ou autre personnage féminine). Tout cela déstabilise l'idée d'une écriture de sexe (gender/genre) figée et joue sur un effondrement de voix 'sexées' (gendered voice) et en conséquence un effondrement des sexes. Pourriez-vous commentez là-dessus?
LL: Je ne saurais me livrer à des commentaires sur ce qui reste obscur pour moi, car en inventant des personnages (il ne faut pas confondre l'écrivain que je suis et l'écrivain qu'est Sola dans *In memoriam*), j'assiste à chaque fois à une *mue** qui s'opère en moi-même: je suis tous les personnages à la fois, quels qu'ils soient. Hommes ou femmes, ils m'habitent et j'essaie de leur donner vie de façon à ce qu'ils soient complexes, qu'ils ne correspondent pas à

un « type » mais qu'ils soient le reflet de ce qu'ils sont au plus profond d'eux-mêmes, et qui est souvent plein de contradictions.

GNC: Vous verrez-vous comme féministe? Croyez-vous écrire en tant que 'femme' ou 'femme engagée' ou simplement écrivain (de genre beaucoup plus neutre)?
LL: Je ne me définis pas du tout comme une féministe. Je me dis que je suis avant tout quelqu'un qui ne sait pas qui elle est, qui à chaque livre part à la découverte d'elle—même. Mais je suis habitée par les grandes figures féminines de la révolte, Antigone par exemple.

GNC: Je pose cette question à cause de votre emploi surtout du mythe d'Antigone dans *Cronos* et *In Memoriam* (et qui apparaît aussi beaucoup plus tôt dans *Les aubes*), mais aussi à la fin d'*A l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* vous vous adressez à 'toutes celles qui se sont dispensées de se conformer aux lois de la nature' - ce qui me parle d'une attitude féministe ou au moins subversive par rapport à la culture dominante, et paraît comme un geste 'politique'. Pourriez-vous m'en dire plus?
LL: Je crois avoir souvent inventé des personnages féminins qui sont en rupture avec le monde. En général, elles sont seules, sans descendants, elles sont plus des sœurs que des amantes, elles incarnent le refus, refus du pouvoir, refus de la maternité, refus des conventions... Ces Antigones perpétuent le geste de l'insoumission. En ce sens, les livres les plus intimistes sont aussi des livres politiques, parce qu'ils disent quelque chose sur ces femmes qui sont entrés en dissidence envers le réel.

GNC: Pourquoi ces textes se concentrent-ils tant sur Antigone, et le sacrifice de la femme (comme, d'ailleurs, Forever)? Est-elle liée chez vous à une politique de rébellion ou révolution? Si c'est le cas, c'est une rébellion contre quoi: capitalisme; patriarchie; la brutalité de la société de nos jours?
Vous suggérez cela dans *Cronos,* mais ce texte offre une rébellion qui échoue?
LL: J'ai été très tôt subjuguée par la figure d'Antigone. On pourrait ajouter aussi Cassandre, celle qui prophétise et n'est pas entendue. Ces mythes permettent de créer des personnages qui ne pactisent pas, qui ne cèdent pas à la tentation de conclure un traité avec le monde pour trouver leur place. Elles se dressent contre un monde où il faut se soumettre ou se démettre, elles s'affirment contre ce que Simone Weil appelle « les machines à écraser l'humanité ». Elles ont foi en l'humanisme, elles ont le culte de ce qui est de l'homme, sans distinction de sexe, de race, de classe.

GNC: Des femmes ont-elles besoin d'une héroïne féminine telle Antigone? Pourquoi est-ce que cette figure soit si souvent une figure martyrisée ou tragique?
LL: Je ne vois pas Antigone comme une martyre, mais comme le porte-drapeau de ce qui en chacun de nous croit encore que les lois non écrites sont plus sacrées que les lois imposées par un Créon, qu'il soit policier ou législateur.

GNC: Le personnage de Sola (dans *Les aubes* mais aussi dans *In Memoriam,* et aussi peut être Una dans *Cronos*) est basé sur l'écrivain autrichien Ingeborg Bachmann – pourquoi est-elle si importante?
LL: Non, ce n'est pas Ingeborg Bachmann qui a inspiré le personnage de Sola dans In memoriam. Mais il est vrai que cette dernière a eu une grande influence sur moi, car elle est

l'incarnation d'une Antigone qui a écrit sur la poursuite de la guerre entre les êtres après l'illusoire fin de la guerre qui a révélé un visage hideux de son pays.

GNC: C'est important pour vous d'écrire en tant que femme, ou est-ce que vous vous voyez simplement comme 'écrivain' au-delà des catégories homme/femme?
LL: Je me considère avant tout comme un écrivain, sans distinction de sexe.

GNC: A votre avis, c'est toujours plus difficile pour les femmes d'être publiées, de se faire prendre au sérieux?
LL: Je ne crois pas. Il faut juger le texte, l'auteur doit passer après.

La Famille:
GNC: Vous avez beaucoup parlé de votre père dans les entretiens jusqu'ici, mais rarement de votre mère. La mère est aussi dans une manière une figure refoulée, rejetée (ou même calomniée) dans votre oeuvre, tel que la féminité et la maternité. Pourriez-vous expliquer or parler de tout cela un peu?
LL: Il est vrai que la figure de la mère dans mes livres est souvent une figure maléfique. Mais cela a peu à voir avec ma mère telle qu'elle est dans la vie. Comme elle vit toujours à deux cents kilomètres de chez moi, je trouverai indélicat de l'évoquer. Dans mon esprit, elle est surtout liée à l'apprentissage du français, car c'est elle qui a tenu à ce que mes sœurs et moi fassions des études au lycée français de Saigon.

GNC: En traitant de la maternité dans *A l'enfant que* vous parlez en profondeur de votre mère, presque pour la première fois (a part de *Les aubes* peut être), mais c'est tellement négatif – avez-vous vraiment une telle image de votre propre mère? Comment la voyez-vous maintenant?
LL: Il faut distinguer la narratrice d'*A l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* et la personne que je suis dans la vie réelle. Cette lettre est une confession, mais même s'il y a des ressemblances entre la narratrice et moi, ce n'est pas MA confession. Et le personnage de Big Mother est imaginaire, comme un certain nombre de choses dans le livre.

GNC: La figure de la mère est souvent liée dans vos textes à l'autorité, mais c'est une autorité reniée ou rejetée – pourquoi? Croyez-vous que c'est plus difficile d'accepter l'autorité d'une mère que du père dans la société occidentale, ou est-ce qu'il s'agit plus simplement d'une situation spécifique liée à votre biographie?
LL: Là encore, il ne faut pas confondre les personnages des livres et l'écrivain qui a inventé ces personnages. Je sais seulement que ce thème revient souvent chez moi et que j'ai souvent créé des personnages de pères assez faibles et de mères dominatrices.

GNC:Quelle importance a-t-il que l'enfant que vous jurez de ne jamais avoir soit un *fils*?
LL: Parce que, comme dit la narratrice, elle avait, dans son adolescence, horreur de sa féminité.

GNC: Vos soeurs sont aussi un peu 'supprimées' dans vos textes, à part dans *Les Trois Parques*, pourquoi?

Dans *Voix* la narratrice semble tirer du soutien et du confort des autres femmes qui l'entourent, une espèce de confrérie féminine qui est mise en contraste avec son isolation et terreur en dehors de l'asile; et dans l'entretien avec Loucif vous parlez brièvement du soutien que vous recevez de vos soeurs. Considérez-vous le soutien des femmes entre eux, des confréries féminines, comme important?
LL: Là encore, je dois rectifier: les personnages des *Trois Parques* n'ont rien à voir avec mes sœurs, à qui mon dernier livre paru, *Lame de fond*, est dédié. J'ai toujours reçu d'elles un fort soutien, mais je ne considère pas cela comme une « solidarité entre femmes ». Je pense que c'est une chance d'avoir des sœurs ou des frères qui s'intéressent à ce que vous faites et qui vous approuvent alors que vous n'êtes pas vraiment dans la norme.

GNC: Dans *Cronos* Una réussit à sauver une jeune fille séquestrée dans l'asile – c'est une vision de cette aide entre femmes?
LL: Ce geste est le geste d'une Antigone. Una obéit à ce que j'appelais tout à l'heure des lois non écrites. Ce n'est pas le fait que cette jeune fille soit une jeune fille qui est important, c'est le fait qu'Una sauve quelqu'un de l'oppression.

GNC: A la fin de *Voix* cette image de la femme loin du monde dans les montagnes froides et hautes m'a beaucoup impressionnée – c'est un peu comme cela que vos personnages féminines apparaissent souvent, c'est aussi un peu comme votre 'personnage' d'écrivain-femme apparaît aussi, non?
Cette isolation ne serait-elle pas problématique?
LL: Je ne me réfugie pas toujours dans une hautaine solitude, mais je suis, il est vrai, assez solitaire. Je crois que l'écriture ne va pas sans une grande solitude. Mais comme dirait Emily Dickinson, je ne suis pas seule, puisque des multitudes m'habitent.

Bibliography

Primary Material:

Simone de Beauvoir Novels:

L'Invitée. 1943. Paris: Gallimard

Le Sang des autres. 1945. Paris: Gallimard

Tous les hommes sont mortels. 1946. Paris: Gallimard

Les Mandarins. 1954. Paris: Gallimard

Les Belles Images. 1966. Paris: Gallimard

La Femme rompue. 1967. Paris: Gallimard

Quand prime le spirituel. 1979. Paris: Gallimard [2006 ed.]

Emma Santos Novels and Plays:

L'Illulogicienne. 1971. Paris: Flammarion

La Malcastrée. 1976. Paris: Édition des femmes [1st ed. 1973, Maspéro]

La Loméchuse. 1978. Paris: Édition des femmes [1st ed. 1973, La Marge-Kesselring]

La Punition d'Arles. 1975. Paris: Stock

J'ai tué Emma S… ou l'écriture colonisée. 1976. Paris: Édition des femmes

Le Théâtre. 1976. Paris: Édition des femmes

L'Itinéraire Psychiatrique. 1977. Paris: Édition des femmes

Écris et Tais-Toi. 1978. Paris: Stock

Effraction au réel. 2006. Paris: Édition des femmes

Linda Lê Novels:

Voix: Une crise. 1998. Paris: Christian Bourgois

Lettre morte. 1999. Paris: Christian Bourgois

Conte de l'amour bifrons. 2005. Paris: Christian Bourgois

In memoriam. 2007. Paris: Christian Bourgois

Cronos. 2010. Paris: Christian Bourgois

À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas. 2011. Paris: NiL

Secondary Material:

Appignanesi, Lisa. 2005. *Simone de Beauvoir*. London: Haus Publishing

Arcan, Nelly. 2004. *Folle*. Paris: Seuil

Argand, Catherine. 1999. 'Entretien: Linda Lê', *Lire,* April http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/linda-le_803102.html [Accessed 3/5/12]

Atack, Margaret & Powrie, Phil. 1990. *Contemporary French Fiction by Women: Feminist Perspectives.* Manchester & NY: Manchester UP

Averis, Kate. 2009. 'Neither Here nor There: Linda Lê & Kim Lefêvre's Literary Homecoming', *Women in French Studies*, 74-84

— 2011. 'Alternative Femininities: Linda Lê and Cristina Peri Rossi' in *Negotiating Nomadic Identities: The Tensions of Exile in Contemporary Women's Writing in French and Spanish'*, unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College London, Ch.5, 184-230

Bacholle-Bošković, Michèle. 2006. *Linda Lê, l'écriture du manque*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

— 2007. 'Les Possédés de Linda Lê' in Castonguay. A, J-F Kosta-Théfaine, M Legault (eds.), *Amour, passion, volupté, tragédie: Le sentiment amoureux dans la littérature français du Moyen Age au XXe siècle*. Biarritz: Séguier, 179-191

Badinter, Élisabeth. 2010. *Le Conflit, la femme et la mère*. Paris: Flammarion

Bair, Deirdre. 1990. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*. New York: Simon & Schuster

Barnes, Leslie. 2007. 'Linda Lê's *Voix* and the Crisis of Representation: Alterity and the Vietnamese Immigrant Writer in France', *French Forum*, 32: 3; 123-138

Barthes, Roland. 1984. 'La Mort de l'auteur' in *Le Bruissement de la langue*. Paris: Seuil

Bates, Laura. 2014. *Everyday Sexism...* London & NY: Simon & Schuster

Baudelaire, Charles. 1999. *Les Fleurs du mal*. Paris: Gallimard.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1949. *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Paris: Gallimard, 2 vols [1976 ed.]

— 1958. *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. Paris: Gallimard.

— 1960. *La Force de l'âge*. Paris: Gallimard

— 1963. *La Forces des choses*. Paris: Gallimard, 2 vols

— 1972. *Tout compte fait*. Paris: Gallimard [1998 ed.]

Berg, Henk de. 2003. *Freud's Theory and its use in Literary and Cultural Studies.* London: Camden House

Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture.* London & NY: Routledge

Bloom, Harold. 1973. *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford UP

Bott, François. 1973. «Emma Santos, 'La Malcastrée'», *Le Monde*, 12 September

Bowie, Malcolm. 1991. *Lacan*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP

Bowlby, Rachel. 1992. *Still Crazy after all these Years: Women, Writing & Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge

Bradette, Marie Eve. 2009. 'Mise en scène 'd'un corps-texte chez Emma Santos', *Écrire (sur) la marge: folie et littérature, Postures* 11: 33-44

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. NY & London: Routledge

— 1998. 'Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*' in Fallaize, Elizabeth (ed.), *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*. London: Routledge

— 2000. *Antigone's Claim*: Kinship Between Life and Death. NY: Columbia UP

Burke, Seán. 2008. *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP [3rd ed.]

Caruth, Cathy. 1995. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP

Caster, Sylvie. 1976. 'Emma Santos: ou Narcisse cause dans son entonnoir' *Charlie Hebdo*. 16 December

Chesler, Phyllis. 1997. *Women and Madness*. NY: Four Walls Eight Windows [1st ed 1972]

Cixous, Hélène. 1961. 'Le Rire de la Méduse', *L'Arc*: 39-54

— 1976. 'Le Sexe ou la tête, *Les Cahiers du GRIF*, 13 (October): 5-15

Cixous, Hélène and Cathérine Clément. 1975. *La Jeune Née*, Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 10/18

Conley, Verena Andernatt. 1984. *Hélène Cixous: Writing the feminine*. Lincoln, Nebraska & London: Nebraska UP

Cousseau, Anne. 2002. 'Les Voix de Linda Lê', in Morello et Rodgers (eds.), *Nouvelles écrivaines; nouvelles voix?* Amsterdam & NY: Rodopi, 201-213

David, Catherine. 1979. 'Becoming Yourself' (Interview with Simone de Beauvoir). *Vogue* (May): 226-97

Dow, Suzanne. 2009. *Madness in Twentieth-Century French Women's Writing*. Bern & Oxford: Peter Lang

Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham & London: Duke UP

Evans, Martha Noel. 1986. 'Murdering *L'Invitée*: Gender and Fictional Narrative', *Yale French Studies*. Special issue: "Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century" 72: 67-86

— 1987. *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in Twentieth-Century France*. Ithaca: Cornell UP

Fallaize, Elizabeth. 1988. *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir*. London: Routledge

— 1993. *French Women's Writing: Recent Fiction*. Basingstoke, Macmillan

— 1998. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader* (ed.). London: Routledge

Fanon, Frantz. 1986. *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles L. Markmann (trans.). London: Pluto Press

Felman, Shoshana. 1978. *La Folie et la chose littéraire*. Paris: Seuil

— 1989. 'Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy' in Belsey, Catherine and Jane Moore (eds.), *The Feminist Reader*. Basingstoke & NY: Palgrave Macmillan [2nd ed. 1997]

Fishwick, Sarah. 1999. 'The elusive 'je': language and female subjectivity in Simone de Beauvoir's *Les Belles Images*', *Modern and Contemporary France,* 7:4; 471-484. [Published online 25th April 2008: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09639489908456516]

Foucault, Michel. 1961. *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Gallimard.

— 1972. *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Gallimard

Francis, Claude and Fernande Gontier. 1979. *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir*. Paris: Gallimard

Freud, Sigmund. 1905. 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' in *Sigmund Freud: On Sexuality*. London: Penguin [1991 ed.], 45-155

— 1919. 'The Uncanny' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol XVII*. London: Hogarth Press, 217-252 (1955 ed.)

— 1920. 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Penguin Freud Reader*, Adam Phillips, ed. London: Penguin [2006 ed.], 132-196

Fullbrook, Edward and Kate Fullbrook. 1998. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Gallop, Jane. 2011. *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time*. Durham & London: Duke UP

Gaunt, Simon. 1995. *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP

Gide, André. 1996. *Journal I (1887-1925)*, Eric Marty (ed.), Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris: Gallimard

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. 1979. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven & London: Yale UP [2000 ed.]

Guichard, Thierry. 1995. 'Le "Famille je vous haïs" de Linda Lê', *Le Matricule des anges*, 13 (août-octobre)

Henke, Suzette A. 1998. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing*. London: Macmillan

Hewitt, Leah D. 1990. *Autobiographical Tightropes: Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig and Maryse Condé*. Lincoln, Nebraska & London: Nebraska UP

Hirsch, Marion. 1981. 'Mothers and Daughters', *Signs* 7: 1

Holland, Alison. 2009. *Excess and Transgression in Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: The Discourse of Madness*. London: Ashgate Press

Holland, Alison T. and Renée, Louise (eds.). 2005. *Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: Women and Language*. New York: Peter Lang

Holmes, Diana. 1996. *French Women's Writing 1848-1994*. London & New Jersey: Athlone Press

Huart, Louis. 1850. *Le Flâneur*. Paris: Aubert

Hugill, Alison. 2011. 'The Act as Feminine: Antigone between Lacan and Butler'. https://www.academia.edu/798605/The_Act_as_Feminine_Antigone_Between_Lacan_and_Butler [Accessed 24 October, 2012]

Hunter, Richard. 2004. *Plato's Symposium*. Oxford: Oxford UP

Hussey, Andrew. 2006. *Paris, the Secret History*. London & NY: Penguin

Hutton, Margaret-Anne (ed.). 2009. *Redefining the Real: The Fantastic in Contemporary French and Francophone Women's Writing*. Oxford & Bern: Peter Lang

Irigaray, Luce. 1974. *Speculum, de l'autre femme.* Paris: Minuit

— 1981. *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère*. Paris: Éditions de la pleine lune

Jameson, Fredric. 1981. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP

Jardine, Alice. 1979. 'Interview with Simone de Beauvoir', *Signs*, Winter: 224-36

Jeanson, Francis. 1966. *Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entrprise de vivre*. Paris: Seuil

Jordan, Shirley. 2004. 'New Women Writers and New Women's Writing in France' in *Contemporary French Women's Writing: Women's Visions, Women's Voices, Women's Lives.* Bern: Peter Lang, 11-73

Keeffe, Terry. 1983. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*. London: Harrap

— 1991. *Les Belles Images, La Femme rompue*. Exeter: University of Glasgow French and German Publications

Kristeva, Julia. 1974. *La Révolution du langage poétique*. *L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle : Lautréamont et Mallarmé.* Paris: Seuil; Collection Tel Quel

— 1980. *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*. Paris: Seuil

— 1980a. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Leon Roudiez, ed., Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon Roudiez, trans., NY: Columbia UP.

— 1982. *Powers of Horror*, NY: Columbia UP

— 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language,* NY: Columbia UP

— 1986. 'Women's Time' in Moi, Toril (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Press. First published as "Le Temps des femmes" in *34/44: Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, 5 (Winter)

— 1987. *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie*. Paris: Gallimard

— 1996. *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*. Paris: Fayard

— 2002. *Revolt, She Said*. NY & Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)

Kuizenga, Donna. 1989. 'Abortive Meanings: Emma Santos and the Inscription of Self', *French Forum,* 14: 339-50

Lacan, Jacques. 1966. 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je' in *Écrits*. Paris: Seuil, 93-101

— 1975. *Encore*: *Le Séminaire, Livre XX*. Paris: Seuil

Laing, R. D. 1960. *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness.* Harmondsworth: Penguin

Lê, Linda. 1987. *Un si tendre vampire*. Paris: Table Ronde

— 1993. *Calomnies*. Paris: Christian Bourgois

— 1997. *Les Trois Parques*. Paris: Christian Bourgois

— 1999. *Tu écriras sur le bonheur*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France

— 2000. *Les Aubes*. Paris: Christian Bourgois

— 2005. *Le Complexe de Caliban*. Paris: Christian Bourgois

— 2009. *Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau.* Paris: Christian Bourgois

Le Calvez, Éric. 2002. *La Production du descriptif. Exogenèse et endogenèse de* L'Éducation Sentimentale. Amsterdam: Rodopi

Lechte, John. 1990. *Julia Kristeva*. NY: Routledge

Ledoux-Beaugrand, Evelyne. 2008. 'Filles du père? Le spectre paternel chez quelques auteures contemporaines' in Clément, Murielle Lucie & Van Wesemael, Sabine (eds.), *Relations familiales dans les littératures française et francophone des XXe et XXIe siècles: La figure du père*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 49-57

Leek, Sara E.. 2012. '"L'écriture qui saigne": Exile and Wounding in the Narratives of Nina Bouraoui and Linda Lê', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 15: 2; 237-255

Le Garrec, Evelyne. 1976. 'du "tu" au "je": la mort d'Emma S…', *Politique-hebdo*, 1-7 April

Loucif, Sabine. 2007. 'Entretien avec Linda Lê', *French Review*, 80:4; 880-893

— 2009. 'Le Fantastique dans *Les Trois Parques* de Linda Lê' in Hutton, M.A., ed., *Redefining the Real: The Fantastic in Contemporary French and Francophone Writing*. Oxford & Bern: Peter Lang, 115-127

— 2009a. 'Linda Lê, La Passeuse', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies (SITES),* 13:4; 495-501

Magnan-Park, Anne. 2008. 'Se retourner dans la langue: Réécriture de mythes et contes occidentaux dans l'œuvre de Linda Lê', *Women in French Studies*. Special Issue; 85-94

Maier, Corinne. 2007. *No Kid: Quarante raisons de ne pas avoir d'enfant*. Paris: Michalon

Malt, Johanna. 2004. *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism and Politics*, Oxford & NY: Oxford UP

Marini, Marcelle. 1992. 'La Place des femmes dans la production culturelle' in Duby, Georges et Perrot Michelle (eds.), *Histoire des femmes en Occident, Vol. 5, Le XXe siècle* (sous direction de Françoise Thébaud). Paris: Plon

Marks, Elaine and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.). 1981. *New French Feminisms*. NY: Schocken Books

McIlvanney, Siobhán. 2009. "'Les Mo(r)ts ne nous lâchent pas': Death and the Paternal/Amorous Body in Linda Lê's *Lettre morte*", *Romanic Review*, 100: 3; 373-387

Mitchell, Juliet. 2003. *Siblings: Sex and Violence.* Cambridge: Polity Press

Moi, Toril. 1981. 'Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's *Dora*', *Feminist Review* 9: 60-74

— 1990. *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

— 1994. *Simone de Beauvoir. The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. Cambridge, Mass. & Oxford: Blackwell

— 2002. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London & NY: Routledge

Morello, Nathalie and Catherine Rodgers (eds.). 2002. *Nouvelles écrivaines: nouvelles voix?* Amsterdam: Rodopi

Ni Cheallaigh, Gillian. 2012. Personal Interview with Linda Lê via email correspondence, December 2012.

— 2013. Personal interview with Linda Lê. Paris, 17 October.

Transcripts of both interviews available at: https://modernlanguages.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research%20Centres/CCWW/Nicheallaigh%20-%20Le%20interview.pdf

Pagès, Irène. 1983. "Le Biologique, la folie et l'écriture" in Canadian Woman Studies/ *Les cahiers de la femme* 5: 1

— 1996. 'Emma Santos' in *Dictionnaire littéraires des femmes de langue française*. Makward, C. & M. Cottenet-Hage (eds.). Paris: Karthala, 538-9

Parry, Benita. 2002. 'Signs of our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*' in *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture & Theory*. London & NY: Continuum, 243-55

Perreault, Jeanne. 1995. *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP

Pineau, Gisèle. 2010. *Folie, aller simple*. Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey

Polverel, Elsa. 2011. 'Le Prolongement d'un symptôme: Emma Santos au mot à mot', *Sens Public*, Revue Internationale, Mars 2011 http://www.sens-public.org/article.php3?id_article=809

— 2014. 'L'*Itinéraire* singulier d'Emma Santos: Une écriture à l'intersection de la révolte féministe, de la psychanalyse et de la construction antipsychiatrique' in Ni Cheallaigh et al. (eds.), Quand la folie parle*: The Dialectic Effect of Madness in French Literature since the Nineteenth Century*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 97-111

Power, Nina. 2012. 'Motherhood in France: Towards a Queer Maternity?' *Paragraph,* 35: 3 (July); 254-264

R., F. 1977. 'Ni psychothérapie, ni témoignage, Emma Santos sur scène', *Choisir: la cause des femme*s, 23: 23

Rich, Adrienne. 1976. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. NY & London: Norton Press

Robson, Kathryn. 2004. *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life Writing.* Amsterdam: Rodopi

Santos, Emma. 1978. 'Le Désamour ou le désir de retrouver son nom', *Sorcière,* 16: 9-10

Schwarzer, Alice. 1972. 'La Femme révoltée', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 14 February, 47-54

— 1984. *Simone de Beauvoir Today*: *Conversations 1972-1982*. Marianne Howarth, (trans.). London: Hogarth Press

Schwerdtner, Karin. 2013. 'Linda Lê: risquer le tout pour le tout (entretien)', *Contemporary French & Francophone Studies (SITES)*, 17: 3

— 2005. *La Femme errante*. Ottawa: Legas

Ségeral, Nathalie. 2014. 'Re(en)gendering the Mother-Daughter Plot in Emma Santos and Unica Zürn, the Child-(m)other and the Pseudogyn', in Ni Cheallaigh et al. (eds.), Quand la folie parle*: The Dialectic Effect of Madness in French Literature since the Nineteenth Century*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 112-132

Selao, Ching. 2011. 'Le père/Vietnam désorienté: *Les Trois Parques* de Linda Lê' in *Le Roman vietnamien francophone: Orientalisme, occidentalisme et hybridité*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 179-196

Sellers, Susan. 1991. *Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Shepherd, Genevieve. 2003. *Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: A Psychoanalytic Rereading*. Bern: Peter Lang

Showalter, Elaine. 1977. *A Literature of Their Own*: *British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP

— 1987. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*. London: Virago

Sophocles. 1947. 'Antigone' in Watling, E.F. (ed. and trans.), *The Theban Plays.* Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Classics

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1989. 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' in Belsey, Catherine and Jane Moore (eds.), *The Feminist Reader*. Basingstoke & NY: Palgrave Macmillan [2nd ed. 1997]

Steiner, George. 1984. *Antigones*: *The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art, and Thought*. Oxford: Oxford UP

Szasz, Thomas. 1973. *Ideology and Insanity: essays on the psychiatric dehumanization of man*. London and NY: Marion Boyars

Thiher, Allen. 1999. *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature*. Michigan: Michigan UP

Tilkin, Françoise. 1990. *Quand la folie se racontait*. Amsterdam: Rodopi

Tzara, Tristan. 1946. 'Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre', *ADAM International Review*, No.162-163: 7-13

Ussher, Jane. 1991. *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf

— 2011. *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience (Women and Psychology)*. Hove, Sussex & NY: Routledge

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book VIII. *Poetry in Translation* website: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:Y9ZXCfOhPf0J:www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilAeneidVIII.htm+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us [Accessed January 2014]

Ward-Jouve, Nicole. 1990. '"Bliss was it in that dawn..." Contemporary Women's Writing in France and the éditions des femmes' in Atack, Margaret & Phil Powrie (eds.), *Contemporary French Fiction by Women*: *Feminist Perspectives*. Manchester & NY: Manchester UP, 127-139

Waterfield, Robin (trans.). 1994. *Plato's Symposium*. Oxford: Oxford UP

Wilson, Andrew. 2013. *Mad Girl's Love Song: Sylvia Plath and Life before Ted*. London: Simon & Schuster

Wilson, Emma. 1996. *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter: Identity and Desire in Proust, Duras, Tournier, Cixous*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

Wilson, Susannah. 2010. *Voices from the Asylum: Four French Women Writers (1850-1920)*, Oxford: Oxford UP

Wolff, Janet. 1985. 'The Invisible *flâneuse*' in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2: 3; 37-46

Woolf, Virgina. 1922. *Mrs Dalloway*, London: Wordsworth Classics [1996 ed.]

— 1927. 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' in *Collected Essays*, Woolf, Leonard (ed.), vol.IV. London: Chatto & Windus [1967 ed.]

— 1928. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin [1945 ed.]

— 2007. *The Selected Works of Virginia Woolf*. London: Wordsworth Editions

Wordsworth, William. 1798. 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', *Poetry Foundation* www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174796 [Accessed 13 October 2014]

Yeager, Jack A. 1997. 'Culture, Citizenship, Nation: The narrative texts of Linda Lê' in Hargreaves, Alex G. and Mark McKinney (eds.), *Post-colonial Cultures in France*. London: Routledge, 255-265

— 2000. 'Linda Lê's Literary Project in France', Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, March 9-12, San Diego, C.A.

— 2006. Foreword, in Bacholle-Bošković, Michèle, *Linda Lê, L'écriture du manque*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, i-iii